

# Young Klondike

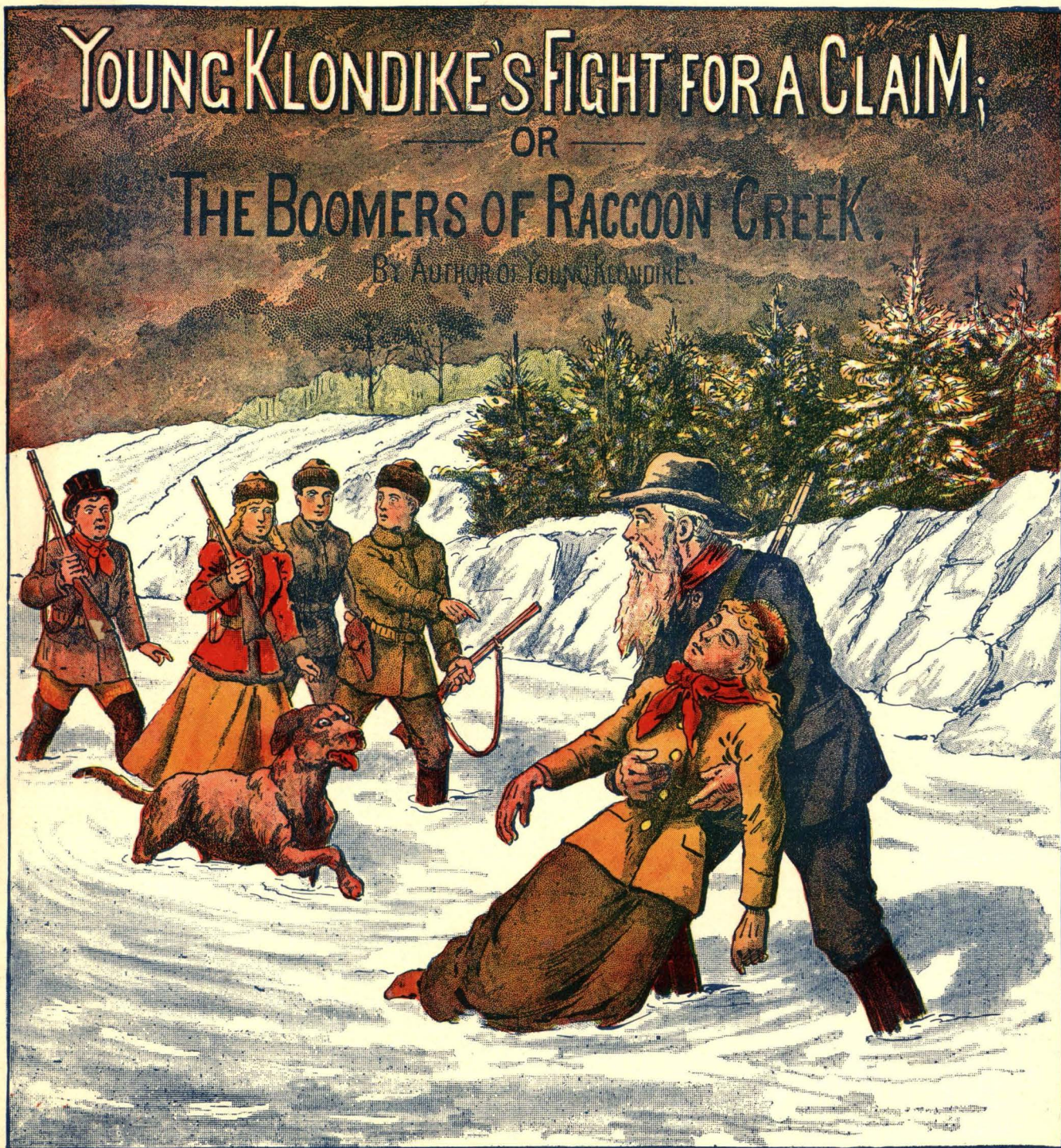
STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

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## YOUNG KLONDIKE'S FIGHT FOR A CLAIM;

OR,

## THE BOOMERS OF RACCOON CREEK.

BY AUTHOR OF YOUNG KLONDIKE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### JUST IN TIME.

"HELP! Help! Help!"

The dismal cry rang out above the howling of the storm.

"Help! Help! Help!"

Once more it sounded dismally, but the wind bore it away into the wilderness, and no one knew better than Mr. Maxwell how little chance there was of the cry being heard.

And yet, if it was not heard, death—and nothing less than death—was due to that party of three prospectors, two men and one woman who crouched under the rocks on the hillside, waiting for Mr. Maxwell's return.

Winter in the Klondike country is a serious business, and that is where these people were.

They had been prospecting among the mountains to the west of Eldorado creek, and like many others who never give much thought to the future had made little or no provision for it, intending to go down to Dawson City as soon as winter set in.

Delaying too long, they started just in time to be caught in the first great snowfall of the season, before they reached the settlements along the line of Eldorado creek.

Realizing their danger they pushed on for several hours through the snow, losing themselves hopelessly just before night came on.

All that night and all the next day the storm continued raging, and during that time the small supply of provisions which remained to the party became exhausted. They had no means of making a fire, either. It was a bad case.

Hungry and cold with the prospect of another night

before them, there is no wonder that Mr. Maxwell and his friends became seriously alarmed. In fact, they were about ready to give up in despair.

They crouched under the rocks until after midnight, when they were suddenly startled out of the deadly stupor which was creeping over them by the barking of a dog.

Fancy what a welcome sound under the circumstances! It gave them new life—hope!

Ordering his companions to remain where they were, Mr. Maxwell, who was decidedly the most robust of the party, hurried out to the brow of the hill and listened.

Again the barking of the dog was heard, and still again, after which all was still.

It was this which made Mr. Maxwell call for help as he did over and over again, trying by every means in his power to throw his voice forward through the storm.

All useless! No answer came; he did not even have the satisfaction of hearing the dog's bark again; he began to doubt if he had heard it at all.

"It's no use, Maggie," he said to his daughter, when he returned to the shelter. "I'm afraid it was only the howling of the wind."

"Don't say that, father. It means death to us. I don't believe I can survive the night."

The old prospector groaned.

"If you say that it will help to kill me, Maggie," he replied. "We must keep up our courage under all circumstances. Jacques—Francois, can you suggest nothing? It means death to remain here so."

It was a useless appeal. The two young French Canadians who had joined the father and daughter back among the hills, really knew as little about the region as he knew himself.

They were as helpless as a pair of babies. Every-



thing thus devolved on Mr. Maxwell himself, and he was utterly at a loss to know what to do.

As the night wore on the storm increased, and so did the seriousness of their situation.

Benumbed by cold, Maggie Maxwell kept sinking off to sleep and her father had to keep rousing her, for sleep under these circumstances meant death.

The two Frenchmen paced up and down before the rocks over a beaten path they had trampled down in the snow. Sometimes Mr. Maxwell joined them. Again he sat by his daughter, who was now too benumbed to stand, encouraging her all he could, hoping against hope until sunrise.

Such was their situation at nine o'clock in the morning, when the barking of the dog was heard again.

This time it was unmistakable.

Mr. Maxwell listened to the sound attentively. It did not seem to come any closer, and that could mean but one thing. Were they nearer to a mining camp than he had supposed?

Mr. Maxwell sprang up, and seizing his rifle, fired shot after shot in slow succession.

Three times he emptied the rifle and reloaded.

The barking of the dog continued, but there was no other response.

"It must be a camp," said Francois. "Shall I push ahead and see, boss?"

"Not yet; let's try it once more," replied Mr. Maxwell. "Don't let us separate, if one goes all should go, for we may need each other's help."

Again he began firing, and before the third shot rang out the answer came.

Three shots in quick succession were heard.

Mr. Maxwell replied in the same way.

Then there was a single shot.

Mr. Maxwell answered by another.

Help was at hand, and forgetting his own caution to Francois he started forward to meet it, calling to the Frenchman to take care of Maggie until his return.

Now, as he plowed his way through the snow the barking of the dog sounded nearer and nearer, and in a moment a huge Newfoundland rushed upon him, barking wildly and leaping about him with every demonstration of joy.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" shouted Mr. Maxwell, filled with hope once more.

"Hello! Who are you?" came the reply out of the storm.

"Storm-bound travelers! Three men, one woman!" shouted Mr. Maxwell. "Come to us, for Heaven's sake!"

"Coming!" replied a hearty voice. "Brace up, friend! Don't despair! You are nearer to rescue than you imagine! Be with you in a moment now!"

Mr. Maxwell pushed on, and soon four figures, well wrapped up in furs and comfortable clothing, came into view through the snow, with the dog running before them, for the knowing animal had returned to show them the way.

Two were young men—little more than boys, in

fact. With them was a decidedly pretty girl, who plowed her way through the snow as boldly as did her companions. The other was a little man wearing big boots and a plug hat, which seemed singularly unseasonable there in the storm.

"Hello, friend!" called one of the young men. "What are you wandering about here, for? Why don't you come in and get warm?"

"Great Heavens! are we so near a human habitation as all that, then?" gasped the poor prospector. "Gentlemen, you have come just in time."

He led the way back to the rock shelter, and when they reached there it looked as if they had come too late.

Maggie Maxwell had sunk into unconsciousness, and it was impossible to arouse her.

"Poor thing! Is she dying?" the young girl exclaimed. "Oh, Ned, we must do something. Let us get her to the house as quick as we can."

"She's freezing!" said the man, with the plug hat. "That's what's the matter with the girl, she's freezing to death. Here, let me take her in."

He bent down, and raising the unconscious girl tenderly, started off through the snow.

Mr. Maxwell, the two Frenchmen and the others followed. The poor old prospector had hardly strength enough left to help himself along; he could not have carried his daughter if he had tried.

"Courage! Courage!" cried the young man who had first spoken. "Follow us, friends, and everything will be all right in a few moments. We came just in time."

## CHAPTER II.

### YOUNG KLONDIKE HEARS OF THE STRIKE ON RACCOON CREEK.

THE singular procession which went tramping through the snow had not proceeded far when a cluster of buildings rose darkly before them through the falling flakes.

If Mr. Maxwell had been less disturbed about his daughter he might have shown some surprise at their size and number, and general substantial appearance.

There were four shaft-houses built over deep holes from which the gold was being daily brought up; there was a blacksmith shop and a large house for workmen, and a smaller, but very substantial house, which evidently belonged to the owner of this valuable mine.

It was toward this house that the little man, with the tall hat, led the way, staggering under his burden.

The door was opened by a stout, motherly woman, who threw up her hands with an exclamation of pity at sight of the unconscious girl.

"Oh, bring her in, Zed!" she cried. "Bring her



right in. Poor thing! Who is she? How dreadful to be lost in a storm like this!"

"Get the front room up-stairs ready for her at once, Mrs. Colvin," ordered the younger man. "Build up a good fire, and see that the bed is comfortable. We'll keep her down here in the sitting-room until you tell us to come."

So they took her into a large room where a bright wood fire burned on the open hearth.

It was a room furnished with every comfort and many luxuries, something so unusual for the Klondike, that Mr. Maxwell might have at once guessed into whose house he had come, even if he had not already recognized the buildings, which was the case.

But his whole thought now was of his daughter, and he said but little until he had seen her comfortably in bed up-stairs, where he left her out of danger, in charge of Mrs. Colvin and the young girl.

Then he returned to the open fire in the room below, where the two young men and he of the tall hat awaited him.

Francois and his companion meanwhile had gone over to the miners' quarters where they were being comfortably entertained.

"Gentlemen, how can I ever thank you," said Mr. Maxwell, stretching out his feet to the cheerful blaze. "I need hardly ask where I am; nobody but Young Klondike could offer a storm-bound traveler such shelter as this up here on El Dorado creek."

"You don't have to thank us," replied the young man. "We heard the dog bark and we knew something must be wrong. Then we heard your shots and that settled it. Sorry we could not have come to you before, but we came as soon as we could."

"You came just in time. My name is Maxwell. I've been doing a little prospecting back among the mountains here. May I ask which of you is the famous Young Klondike? As I said before, I know one of you must be he."

"I'm the fellow they call Young Klondike," laughed the young man.

Mr. Maxwell was slow of speech, and determined to get things straight.

"That's what I thought," he said. "You are Ned Golden, then?"

"I am."

"Your young friend here is Dick Luckey, I suppose?"

"He is."

The firm of Golden & Luckey is said to be the richest in the whole Klondike country."

"I don't know about that; we've done fairly well, though."

"I should say you had! If we can believe what we hear, you are worth a couple of million at least. I've heard tell that you came out here just a couple of poor New York clerks."

"Well, we didn't have very much, that's a fact."

"Yes, I've heard all about you. This gentleman, I take it, is the detective who always goes around with you?"

"That's me," laughed the little man.

"Yes, they call you the Unknown, I believe?"

"So they do."

"I've heard say that nobody knows your name; that you won't even tell it to Young Klondike and his partner."

"The last is true enough," said Ned, laughing. "If you can make him tell his name, Mr. Maxwell, you'll do me the greatest favor in life."

"The last may be true, but the first ain't," chuckled the Unknown, "for there's one person right here in this room who knows my name."

"Meaning yourself," said Dick.

"Meaning myself, of course."

"Much good that does us," said Ned. "Why don't you tell us your name and be done with it?"

"Ah! that's my secret," laughed the Unknown. "Go right on with your questions, Mr. Maxwell. It's no use to discuss me."

"Well, I want to discuss you a little longer," replied the prospector, in his slow way. "You see, I've often heard about you people, and I want to satisfy my curiosity while I've got a chance."

"Fire away, then," said the Unknown. "I'm here to be talked to, and don't care a hang."

"Well, then, they tell me that you are up here hunting for some mysterious criminal—that so?"

"So they say."

"They tell me that you are pretty apt to mistake people for this man, and to grab a fellow when he least expects it, and sometimes put the handcuffs on him."

"Never saw him actually put the handcuffs on," said Dick, "but I've heard him threaten to do it often enough. You may consider yourself lucky that he didn't try that game on you right there in the snow."

"That's right! That's right!" said the Unknown. "Go ahead and abuse the old man. He's got no friends!"

"Oh, it ain't that I'm abusing anyone, or want to," said Mr. Maxwell, "but everybody is curious about Young Klondike's crowd. You must know that."

"Any more questions you want to ask, mister?" said Ned, who was beginning to grow tired of all this useless talk.

"I'd like to ask about this young lady."

"Never mind her."

"Pardon, me. Isn't she Miss Edith Welton?"

"Yes, she is."

"They say you saved her life on the way out from Seattle—rescued her from a wrecked steamer. Is that so?"

"Yes, it is. Now I shan't answer any further questions. Miss Welton is a member of the firm of Golden & Luckey, and this is the Young Klondike mine on El Dorado creek, our principal property, and you are as welcome here as flowers in May, providing you don't bother us with any further questions."

"I'm done," said the prospector. "I've heard all



about these things so many times that I naturally wanted to know. You can ask me as many questions as you like, young man, I'm ready to answer them all."

"I have only one to ask you," replied Ned. "What luck did you have back there among the hills?"

Now, this, we must explain, was a sort of standard question with Young Klondike.

Like a sensible fellow he never lost an opportunity to post himself in his business—and he made it a rule to inquire about every new region when the chance offered.

The mountains just back of his own great property had been very imperfectly prospected.

To be sure Young Klondike had done something at it himself, but it was a big contract, and he felt that he knew nothing about them, and consequently was ready for any news Mr. Maxwell had to impart.

"Well, I didn't make out very well," replied the old man. "I was only gone three weeks."

"You started too late in the season."

"Yes, so I did."

"Strike anything?"

"Oh, yes; up on Raccoon creek I made a small strike. Didn't amount to anything, though."

"Perhaps you didn't work the lead long enough."

"Perhaps; but I don't believe that. I worked it till it petered out."

"What did you find?"

"Why, gold, Young Klondike; that's what I was after, to be sure."

"Of course; was it flake gold, or was it nuggets, or was it dust?"

"Nuggets, mostly."

Ned Golden kept his own counsel. He wasn't parting carelessly with the information it had cost him so much to acquire.

But he knew perfectly well that the nuggets in the Klondike country always occur in extensive beds.

To have found a few nuggets meant that there should be more—a big deposit in all probability. Ned was open for just such information as this.

He questioned Mr. Maxwell further and made him describe the location of Raccoon creek.

Drawing him out more and more he persuaded him to display a little bag of nuggets taken from this Raccoon creek.

These were spread out upon the table, and Ned examined them closely.

He saw at once that they ran larger than the regulation nuggets of the Klondike.

To suppose that they were isolated specimens was to suppose the improbable, not to say the impossible.

Ned made up his mind that Mr. Maxwell had begun on the extreme edge of a big gold deposit.

He felt equally certain that instead of working it toward the deposit he had operated in the wrong direction, and moved away from it, which would account for the claim petering out suddenly.

Taken altogether Ned felt that the information he

had received from Mr. Maxwell was valuable, and that the strike on Raccoon creek was worth looking at, to say the least.

Now, in cases like this, Young Klondike usually acted promptly. He had the money to do it with, too.

If he heard of any claim worth working that he cared to take hold of, he never allowed money to stand in the way.

"Going back there to work?" he asked Mr. Maxwell.

"No," was the reply. "I'm going back to Dawson; I'm done."

"Going to locate that claim?"

"Well, hardly; I might."

"Hard up, I suppose?"

"Haven't got a cent to my name. I'm clean busted."

Here was a case for charity, then, and not one where it was necessary to buy.

Young Klondike was very charitable. He felt sorry for Maxwell, and with the desire to help him along, offered him five hundred dollars for all his rights to the claim on Raccoon creek.

It is wonderful how the possession of a little money—or even the promise of it will change a man.

The moment old Maxwell heard this exceedingly liberal offer he jumped at the conclusion that Young Klondike knew something about the Raccoon creek diggings, which was not at all the case.

"Well, I think five hundred dollars is too little for that there claim, boss," he said. "Can't you make it a thousand?"

Ned stared. He could hardly believe his ears.

"Well, upon my word, that's cool," said Dick.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, it is as cold as ice!" cried the Unknown, in a rage. "That's all the thanks you get for trying to help a fellow, Young Klondike. The claim is as much yours as it is his until it's located. Don't you give him a blame cent."

And Ned didn't. He was disgusted with Mr. Maxwell's greed and backed out altogether.

Then they all went out to overlook the beginning of the work of the day, leaving Mr. Maxwell by the fire angry enough to think that he had missed what certainly was a good thing.

"Of course you won't have anything to do with that Raccoon creek claim, Ned?" remarked Dick, as they walked over to the main shaft-house.

"On the contrary, I'm determined to go up there and have a look at it just as soon as the storm is over," replied Ned. "Something tells me we are going to strike big luck on Raccoon creek."

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE UNKNOWN AND THE GRIZZLY BEAR.

Two days later Young Klondike with Dick, Edith and the Unknown started back among the hills for Raccoon creek.



Now this was the way Young Klondike always did business.

Once he undertook to do a thing he always went right to work at it and did his best to carry it out.

The day before they started, rather a singular thing happened at the mine.

Old man Maxwell, who had been sour and sullen ever since the affair of the money, took himself off in the night, taking his daughter with him.

Where he went, or how, or why, nobody seemed to know, least of all the two French Canadians, Jacques and Francois, to whom Young Klondike had given work in the mine.

Still, there was plenty of other mines to which they might have gone both up and down El Dorado creek, or they might even have started to walk to Dawson City, for the creeks were now all frozen solid and the storm had passed away.

Young Klondike made all possible inquiry, and then gave it up.

It wasn't an affair which concerned him very much; the only thing that seemed strange was that the man should have gone in the middle of the night.

He didn't know that old Maxwell was an exceedingly vindictive fellow, a man who in spite of his natural affection for his daughter was ready to sell himself to any vicious scheme where there was a dollar to be made.

Nor did he guess that this same Maxwell, instead of feeling the gratitude he should have felt for Ned Golden's timely assistance had taken a violent hatred toward Young Klondike and Dick, and especially toward the Unknown.

But more about this later.

At present we find Young Klondike wearing snowshoes, and carrying a rifle slung over his shoulder, tramping through one of those deep valleys which lie between the mountains back of El Dorado creek.

Edith is right behind him, and behind Edith Dick walks, and behind Dick again comes the Unknown.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is a fine stretch of country, boys!" the detective called out just about the time we meet our friends. "I'd no idea there was anything like it so near us. There's wood enough on that mountain to supply us a hundred years."

Wood was a scarce article around the Young Klondike Mine, and of course a great deal of it was used in the winter, hence the Unknown's interest now.

"You're right, there is," said Dick. "We could easily send a gang of men up here to cut some and haul it down to camp."

"Certainly we can," added Ned, "and I rather think I'll do it. We ain't more than fifteen miles from the creek."

"Our mules can do that business all right," said the detective, "but look here, boys, it's going to be dark soon, and we want to begin to think about the night."

It was only a little after one o'clock, but then it would be dark shortly after two.

Not that darkness makes so very much difference up in the Klondike country.

People really pay but little attention to it, and were it otherwise, little or no business would be done in the winter, while exactly the reverse is the case.

At the mines work goes right on after a fashion, and by the aid of lanterns travelers keep on traveling, but to travel in an unknown region like this in the darkness is another thing.

The matter had been discussed, and the unanimous vote was it would not be safe.

They had fifteen miles further to go before reaching Raccoon creek, and they accordingly resolved to tie up in this valley for the night.

Accordingly a suitable spot was selected, and each one throwing his load on the snow, preparations for building a wicky-up began.

Now there are many kinds of wicky-ups.

The name is properly applied to an Indian shelter of brush or skins.

Up in Klondike it stands for such a shelter as Ned Golden and his companions set about building now.

First they got out a short handled ax which they invariably carried on these prospecting tours, and cut down four small spruce trees, lopping off the branches so as to give four good forked stakes.

This done, two of the stakes were driven into the snow about six feet apart, and the others were put in place behind them some four feet away.

Next ridge poles were put across the stakes and the frame-work of a double wicky-up was formed.

The branches cut off and others were now taken and planted in the snow with their thick ends resting against the ridge pole.

This formed the inner covering, and it was so arranged as to divide the wicky-up into two compartments, the outer one, which was larger, being for the boys and the Unknown, and the inner one for Edith.

Next move was to cut hemlock boughs, which are much thicker than spruce, and these were piled up against the others until you could hardly see an opening.

All that now remained was to make a door which was accomplished by cutting away the hemlocks with a sharp knife, leaving a low entrance through which it was necessary to crawl in order to get inside. To have made a larger door would only have been to let in a lot more cold air, and there was enough of that sure to get in through the small openings between the boughs.

The wicky-up was now complete, and there was nothing left to do but to spread their big blankets inside and build a big fire without.

Everything was as comfortable as possible inside when they got the lanterns lighted, for by this time it was quite dark.

The fire shed its warmth through the opening, and the big lantern made it light and cheerful, and lent some heat besides.

Edith hustled about and prepared dinner, for in



their anxiety to get forward they had not stopped for that while daylight lasted.

The cloth was spread directly on the snow, and tin plates and cups put in place.

There was a good soup and canned meat and vegetables, all heated steaming hot over the fire, coffee, of course, and bread made by the baker at the mine, not to mention sundry etceteras which added greatly to the meal. After dinner, Ned got out his banjo and played, while Edith sung and the Unknown told stories and they put in an hour or so, after which all took their rifles and went out under the stars to see if it would be possible to pick up a little something in the way of fresh meat.

There was moose to be had and an occasional caribou.

Rabbits might be looked for, but without much hope of finding them, and above all, there was bear on the programme, and what could be better than bear steak for hungry travelers, we would like to know?

They wandered along through the valley on their snow-shoes for quite a distance without seeing the least trace of game, which, by the way, is very scarce in this region, when all at once they struck a line of tracks so broad and deep that the uninitiated would have imagined that they must have been made by an elephant at least.

But no, it was nothing of the sort.

As soon as she caught sight of them, Edith said "rabbits!" and she meant rabbits, for a rabbit's track is one of the largest to be found here in the snow.

"We want that fellow!" declared Ned. "Track seems to be pretty fresh, too."

"So it is!" said the Unknown. "I'll bet he isn't half an hour gone. Probably he's lying under some bush over there at the beginning of the rise."

They now began to follow the tracks, which led them over toward the mountain.

"Wonder how much further it is to Raccoon creek, anyhow?" questioned Dick. "Who knows where that interesting stream is located?"

"Blest if I do," replied Ned. "The Unknown claims to all right. I'm leaving it entirely to him."

"And you may with perfect safety," said the detective. "Don't you fret, boys; I'll take you to Raccoon creek."

"So you've said half a dozen times," replied Ned. "Would you mind telling us where it is, though?"

"Why, of course not. Raccoon creek lies right over on the other side of that mountain. Our trail would have led us around the mountain, but if you were to climb it and go down on the other side, it would be just the same."

"Then it's no great distance away," said Edith.

"As the crow flies I don't believe it's two miles," replied the detective, "but to go around the mountain it might be five. I remember going to Raccoon creek once before, and to the best of my recollection I've got it straight."

"Rabbits!" cried Ned, suddenly, as two big, long-eared Jack rabbits came up out of the snow, and with big bounds made for the bushes which here at the foot of the mountain grew quite thick.

Edith fired, and so did the Unknown.

The rabbits bounded on, but a trail of blood was left behind them, showing that at least one had been wounded.

"I'll get those fellows or bust!" cried the Unknown, and he dashed on into the bushes, disappearing.

Suddenly there was a rush and a snarling growl, and the voice of the Unknown shouting for help.

Before anyone had time to say a word or make a move, they saw a huge grizzly bear appear among the bushes.

He had the Unknown in his huge jaw—seemed to have caught him by the coat in the back.

The detective was kicking and waving his hands wildly.

"Help! Help, boys! Kill him or I'm a goner!" he cried.

Edith fired at the risk of killing the Unknown.

The shot was a miss, and the monster shuffled on up the side of the mountain with the Unknown shouting lustily for help.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BIG STRIKE UP RACCOON CREEK.

"WHAT'S to be done! Save him! Save him!" Edith cried.

Edith had fired twice, and Ned and Dick had each got in a shot, but it didn't seem to make a bit of difference to the bear.

On he went up the mountain, and presently disappeared among the ledges.

The Unknown had now ceased to struggle and call out; Edith felt afraid that he was dead.

It was an exciting moment. They all hurried up the mountain, but it is slow work getting over the ground with snow-shoes, even on a level, and when you come to climb a mountain with them it is even worse.

It seemed almost hopeless to expect to overtake the bear; under ordinary circumstances it would have been easy enough to shoot the beast, but fear of hitting the detective stood in the way of good aiming, and this was the result.

"Keep cool," said Ned. "It may not be so bad. I've every confidence in the Unknown, and I'd be willing to bet that he'll work out of this snap same as he has out of a dozen others."

They pushed on, following the trail without difficulty, for the snow was soft here and the impression of the bear's paws was strongly marked.

Their suspense was not to last long.

As soon as they reached the ledges they found that the mountain was not the straight ascent they had supposed.

Instead of that there was a sharp descent into a deep valley, beyond which the mountains rose again.



They barely had time to take this in when they heard a loud shout in the valley, and looking down saw a fearful combat in progress.

It was the Unknown and the grizzly bear.

In some way the detective had managed to get free and draw the long, keen-bladed knife which he always carried.

Twice they saw him drive it into the bear and then the big brute went over on the snow.

"Hooray! By the Jumping Jeremiah, I've fixed him!" shouted the detective, jumping about the bear. He made a rush in a moment, and drove the knife home again.

That last blow settled it. There was a dead bear in the valley when Young Klondike and the others came down.

"Zed, are you hurt?" cried Edith, as they came hurrying up.

"Hurt? Not a bit of it! There's no feeling in my overcoat, and that's all my grizzly friend got between his teeth. I'm afraid he is hurt, though."

"Wouldn't wonder if he was!" laughed Ned. "You've certainly fixed him. Is he dead?"

"Dead as a door nail!"

"Bully for you, Zed! How did he get you?"

"Why, I can't tell you," replied the Unknown. "He pounced on me all in a moment. Before I knew where I was at, there was the bear rising on his hind legs, and then he collared me—if you can call catching me by the back of the coat collaring me. Anyhow, he got me, and held on tight until it pleased his bearship to lay me down."

"You must have been spry to lay him down the way you did," said Dick.

"Well, now, I was, sure! I just didn't lie there when he dropped me. I jumped up quicker'n scat and drove my knife in between his ribs. Between you and me, boys, I think I took his bearship by surprise."

"You deserve to have a medal struck in your honor," said Dick. "All's well that ends well."

"A leather medal, dear boy."

"Suppose we make it gold," laughed Ned.

"What shall we put on it?"

"A big bear with an unknown detective in his mouth, legs and arms wriggling."

"Whose legs and arms—the detective's or the bear's?"

"Time!" cried Dick. "Enough of this. We've got the bear anyhow, and there'll be no starving in this camp for many a day to come."

It was indeed a prize in spite of the disagreeable circumstances under which it was obtained, but none of the party had any disposition to pursue the adventure further just then.

To be sure the moon made it as bright as day, but it would soon set, and Edith felt that they ought to lose no time in getting back to camp.

So nothing was done about the bear until morning, when after an uneventful night they returned to the valley, finding the bear just where they had left it.

"Too big for the wolves to carry away," was the decision of the Unknown.

"Did you hear them howling about last night?" asked Ned.

"Once I did. I thought we should find our bear all torn to pieces."

"Reckon they didn't get this way at all," said Dick. "You see yourself there ain't a trace of them here."

There were no tracks on the snow, so it was evident that the wolves did not get on the scent of the bear, and our friends now went to work to put the carcass of the dead grizzly in shape to be used by themselves.

First it was necessary to skin it, then to cut it up.

It would be a good morning's work for two, so Dick and the Unknown went right at it.

There being no chance for any more to work over the bear, Ned and Edith set out to explore the valley which offered some peculiar features, which made Ned think that it might be a good place to look for gold.

The valley was long and narrow, and the slope of the land from both sides abrupt.

Through the middle of it ran a creek, frozen over for the most part, although here and there where the water ran rapidly over shallow there were large air holes. All this promised well, and Ned at last located one spot where he determined to dig, and said as much to Edith.

"Then you don't intend to push on to Raccoon creek?" asked Edith.

"You'll be rather surprised, perhaps, when I tell you that I believe this is Raccoon creek," replied Ned.

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do."

"But the Unknown is very sure that Raccoon creek lies on the other side of this mountain."

"The Unknown is mistaken, if I know anything," declared Ned. "I'll bet you what you like this is Raccoon creek."

"But he claims to have been to the creek before."

"I know; that was in summer time, though, and then things looked altogether different. I don't believe he could locate Raccoon creek now if he tried."

"It don't make much difference to us, anyhow. If we've got a good prospect here, that's all we want."

"I should like to see that hole old man Maxwell dug, if I can find it, and I believe I can right here. Let's push on further up the creek."

They started ahead then, and following around behind some high rocks, came suddenly upon a wicky-up.

It was deserted, and looked lonely enough there in the snow.

Right in front of it the creek ran, and here was an air hole bigger than any they had seen yet. This place offered a more promising prospect even than the one Ned had located.



Young Klondike at once declared his belief that this was old Maxwell's camp.

Entering the brushwood shelter, they found a good deal of rubbish and paper scattered about, and upon some of the scraps of paper was Mr. Maxwell's name.

"Raccoon creek, by thunder!" cried Ned. "You see now who was right, Edith. It was just exactly as I said."

"I can't deny it," replied Edith. "This is evidently Mr. Maxwell's abandoned camp."

"Come, the man who would refuse five hundred dollars for this prospect, situated as he was, must be an idiot."

Edith questioned whether or no it was worth any more to them, but Ned was stubbornly determined to try his luck right here.

It was the following day before they went at it, however.

By the time the bear was skinned and cut up it was one o'clock, and that meant dinner, after which Ned having announced his discovery they built another wicky-up at old Maxwell's camp, and spent the balance of the day moving their belongings up to this new location.

That night it was broiled bear steaks for supper, and nothing could have been more savory.

During the night it grew warmer, and by morning a thaw set in. Considering the time of year it was now extraordinarily mild.

"Just the weather for us," declared Young Klondike. "We must make hay while the sun shines. I think we better make up our minds to give at least one week to this, and go about the business in the regular way."

"That means a day's wood chopping," said Dick. And so it did, for although they found where old Maxwell's woodpile had been, there was nothing on it of any consequence.

Ned led the way up the mountain side to a hemlock grove, and the rest of the day was spent gathering up dry wood of which there was plenty, some scattered over the ground, and more in the form of trees which had fallen and died.

This wood was carried down to camp and heaped up into a great pile.

It took the entire day to get this pile in shape to do any work.

Another quiet night passed.

The warm weather continued. What with the heat of the sun during the day and the temperature being above freezing all night, there was quite a change in the appearance of the snow next morning.

The ground was bare in spots, and in some places the ice was gone off the creek, which had now risen very considerably.

It continued to rise all day, and to make matters more interesting a rain storm set in.

It was a most uncomfortable day. Nothing could be done, and it was hard to know where to go, for it

was tedious work sitting in the wicky-up, but that was what they had to do.

Fortunately Ned had anticipated this, and a big tarpaulin had been brought along.

This was spread over the wicky-ups, and kept them comparatively dry inside.

That dismal day and the night which followed came to an end at last.

Ned was afraid that it would clear off cold, but it didn't; the day following was warm and sunny, and when the sun rose Ned saw that the snow was pretty well gone.

Discoveries were now in order.

They found old man Maxwell's prospect-hole without difficulty, and the place where he had done his panning, and in fact every indication that they had struck the right camp.

While Edith was getting ready for dinner Ned was just beginning to take out dirt from the prospect-hole.

It took two hours to burn out the frost, and then they were only able to work down three feet.

Two more would take them below the frost line, Ned calculated, but they dug no more in that hole.

Careful panning showed only a few nuggets and but little flake gold.

When they quit work that night, the new claim on Raccoon creek looked to be rather a hopeless case.

"It's just as I tell you," declared Ned. "We are right on the edge of a deposit, or there's nothing here at all."

"Even chance it's the last," said Dick.

"I don't believe it. I can't believe it. The way I argue is that if there wasn't a big deposit near us, we wouldn't find those nuggets lying the way we do. It's always a sure indication."

"Then you haven't lost hope?" asked the Unknown.

"Not a bit of it. On the contrary, I'm more hopeful than ever. It's my opinion that to-morrow will see us with a big strike on our hands."

They made every preparation to meet it.

All night long a huge fire was kept up over the ground, lying between Maxwell's prospect-hole and the creek, for Ned, for reasons of his own, based upon the extended experience he had had in the Klondike country, was sure the nugget bed lay in that direction.

By morning the ground was comparatively soft, and drained of the surface water.

Space was then cleared and a shaft marked out, six by twelve; this was full size, for if the prospect proved a success it was Young Klondike's intention to bring up a gang of men and work the claim all winter, for which reason he concluded that it would be wiser to begin in the regular way.

It needed some twenty feet of digging now to get down to the level of Maxwell's hole, for the ground was a little higher here.

Ned calculated that it would take three days to accomplish this, but it only took two.



By quitting time on the second evening they were well below the frost line and had struck black sand.

This looked decidedly favorable.

In Maxwell's hole there was no black sand, and it is in this that the deposit of nuggets is usually to be found. Still there was nothing certain.

Ned washed out a few of the pans of sand before they knocked off, but there was almost no gold in the stuff.

Morning came and it was still warm and sunny.

The weather could not have been more favorable if it had been made to order. It was really very unusual for this season of the year.

"Now to get down to business!" exclaimed Ned as soon as breakfast was over. "We must make it go to-day or not at all."

They started in on the black sand by lantern light at half-past six.

As it is not easy work panning in the dark, they kept right on digging until nine, when the sun rose.

"No sign of big nuggets yet," said Ned, leaning on his shovel, "and yet we have run the hole two feet more."

"Shall we try a pan or two?" asked Dick.

"Well, perhaps it would be as well, but somehow I'd like to put it through a bit further."

"No objection, but I see Zed is getting restless; he's about as anxious as a man can be to find out what we've got here."

"That's all nonsense," declared the Unknown, who was on the ground above doing the hoisting. "I'm perfectly willing to bow to the opinion of Professor Klondike. If he don't know how to work out a prospect-hole in good shape there's no man living who does."

Now this was true enough.

Ned had been wonderfully successful in his mining operations on the Klondike and up the creeks.

To be sure he had made mistakes and spent his time working claims that were valueless, but then everybody does that. It is part of the programme.

On the other hand, Young Klondike had struck claims of amazing richness.

They had made the fortune of the firm of Golden & Luckey. These young men were millionaires.

Decidedly Ned's opinion was of value; it was sought for by many old miners. The Unknown would have been a fool to have ignored it now.

"We'll go on down about two feet further," declared Ned. "It is easy digging here in the sand, and that will take us until about noon. Right away after dinner, we will begin panning whether we strike anything or not."

At noon there was no change in the appearance of the sand in the bottom of the shaft.

Ned felt quite discouraged. He knew well enough that there was nothing great in what had been taken out.

Still he made up his mind to persevere until dark at all events.

"I'll dig here alone, Dick," he said; "you and the

Unknown can begin panning and see what you make out of it. Until we strike bed rock I don't feel like giving up."

So Young Klondike worked on alone digging in the middle of the shaft, and banking the sand up against the sides.

It was dull work and not enlivened any by the occasional calls from Dick.

"Nothing in this pan!" was the cry.

"Just a color in this. Two nuggets here!"

These were the calls as the different pans were washed out.

Dick tried his last pan after about an hour's work.

"I won't do any more," he declared, "for it's really no use. If this don't pan out better than the others we may as well give it up."

Just then came a cry from the shaft.

"Hooray! Hooray! Eureka! Here we are at last!"

Dick dropped the pan and ran like a madman.

As he dropped it at the Unknown's feet, of course, the detective had to tumble over it and go sprawling.

But he picked himself up in a hurry, and got to the mouth of the shaft as soon as Edith, who came running out of the wicky-up.

"What's the row?" he shouted. "By the Jumping Jeremiah! are we in it again? Ye gods and little fishes! Speak up, Young Klondike, and let a fellow know."

"It's a big strike!" called Ned from out of the shaft. "The whole bottom of this blessed old prospect-hole is full of gold."

## CHAPTER V.

### HOW YOUNG KLONDIKE MADE A HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS AND LOST IT INSIDE OF A WEEK.

IF there ever was a jubilant crowd on the Klondike, it was our prospectors around Raccoon creek now.

They made the air fairly ring with their shouts.

The discovery was really a great one.

When Dick got down into the shaft he found that Ned had struck into a perfect nest of nuggets.

There they lay, those dull yellow bits, packed in among the black sand like sardines in a box.

They filled the entire surface of the hole as opened, and there was every reason to believe that others were there underlying the black sand.

The Unknown took a survey of the situation from the top of the hole.

"Oh, I can see well enough," he declared, looking down. "I don't like this climbing down into the shafts for a cent. By the Jumping Jeremiah, boys, this is a regular old-time strike! Ned, how deep does it go down?"

"Give it up. To China, I hope."

"Stick the pick into it! Run the spade down!



This may be only a thin layer of the yellow boys after all."

"Oh, I've tried that already. They go down at least a foot."

"And that alone means a fortune. We can drift and drift, and scoop 'em out by the bucket full."

"Of course; it is just as I told you. Old Maxwell got on the edge of a big deposit. I never saw nuggets such as he showed me since we came to the Klondike, that didn't mean just that."

"Samples, samples!" cried Edith. "Have I got to come down into the hole to see them? Where's your gallantry, boys?"

"Wait a moment and we'll send you up a bucket full!" cried Ned.

The Unknown let the bucket down then, and Ned and Dick shoveled it full.

It was a fine display. The bottom of that hole seemed to be made up almost of pure nuggets—there was very little sand.

It was hardly necessary to do any panning on such stuff as this in order to find out how its value ran.

Still Edith and the Unknown washed out a few pans.

It ran fully four ounces to the pan, which was great luck.

The nuggets averaged about the size of a pea.

Some ran up as big as robins' eggs, others were mere grains. There was also much coarse flake gold.

While the panning was in progress, Ned and Dick scooped out a small hole in the middle of the shaft to a depth of about three feet.

The deposit continued unchanged.

There could be no doubt that Young Klondike had made a strike of immense value.

"I'll look up old Maxwell and pay him well for this," declared Ned. "I don't want to wrong any man."

"That's what's the matter," said Dick. "It would ease my conscience to have you do it, yet it's not to be denied that Maxwell was an old ginger to attempt to get money out of you the way he did."

After the first flush of the excitement was over, the situation was discussed, and it was determined to take out all the gold they could that afternoon.

There was no telling when the weather might change again, or how soon they would see the necessity for making a move.

There never was such an afternoon's work—never!

They kept it up to six o'clock working the last part of the time with lanterns, and the result was tremendous.

It was evident that if this state of things continued, Young Klondike and his partners were destined to make the biggest kind of a big haul inside of a very few days.

Still it was not feasible to work this claim so through the winter.

The terrible climate of the Klondike stood dead in the way of that.

Any day might bring another snow storm, and

once winter set in that would be an end to operations until the opening of spring, as far as their individual efforts were concerned.

Realizing this fully Ned called a meeting for consultation that night.

"Shall we attempt to run here this winter? that's the question," said Young Klondike. "We want to decide it now."

"How much will it cost for us to fit up this place for winter work?" asked Dick.

"That's the first question," said Edith, "and the next is, have we still time to do it?"

"Answer to the first probably five thousand dollars," said Ned promptly. "To the second it is doubtful. We can try; we may succeed and may fail."

"Then I say let's put it off till spring," said Dick.

"But I don't like putting off things. Here's a good prospect and I say it should be pushed."

"Let me make a suggestion," said the Unknown. "Let's take out all we can this week, and quit on Saturday night no matter what the showing is."

"I favor that," said Dick.

"And I," added Edith.

"I don't, but I give in," said Ned. "The majority rules."

"Then that being settled what we shall do next is to make good our hold on this claim," said the detective. "I say we had better get down to Dawson with our dust, record the claim and make ourselves solid."

"That's the talk," said Ned. "We haven't been down to Dawson in sometime. I agree to that."

Edith and Dick joined right in.

It was so agreed, and next day, the weather holding fine, work was pushed harder than ever.

During this day the entire bottom of the shaft was laid bare, and the result was most satisfactory.

The nugget bed filled the whole space.

Great work was done during the afternoon.

It just simply amounted to hoisting out gold and nothing else, for there was almost no sand.

About twenty-five thousand dollars was taken out before six o'clock.

Next day there was over thirty thousand dollars taken out, and by the end of the week Golden & Luckey found themselves one hundred thousand dollars richer than they had been when they started in to work on Raccoon creek.

It was one of the most successful undertakings in which Young Klondike had ever engaged.

This was Saturday night, and the weather still continued perfect. It was most unusual for this time of year.

"We'll put in a good night's rest and pack our gold over to the Young Klondike to-morrow," Ned declared.

The gold was piled up in a special wicky-up built for the purpose.

It was packed in small bags which could be easily tied together and slung over the shoulder.



Of course it was not possible for our four friends to carry one hundred thousand dollars in gold at one load.

Fifty pounds apiece was about the limit, and that meant slow progress.

Ned calculated that they could do it in two trips by bringing back help from the Young Klondike on their return.

It was Dick's first watch that night. As there had not been an alarm of any kind since they started in here, Dick did not look for one to-night, and yet just before twelve o'clock it came.

Dick was pacing up and down before the wicky-up, when his attention was attracted by a slight sound just inside the timber line behind the brush shelters.

Seizing his rifle he crept around behind the wicky-up, and peered in among the spruce trees.

He could see nothing and for some moments hear nothing.

Then, as he watched, it seemed to him that there was some animal moving among the spruces.

"It's a fox, and I'll bet on it," thought Dick. "I can catch that fellow if I'm sharp."

He tip-toed to the spruces, and stood listening, peering in among the trees.

Again all was silence. Dick began to wonder if after all he could have been mistaken, when all at once a rope came whizzing through the air and landed over his head.

Dick realized what had happened instantly. He had been lassoed! He tried to grab the rope and failed.

It tightened about his neck before he could remove it, and over went poor Dick sprawling on the ground.

Instantly two men leaped out from among the spruces, and jumped on him.

One clapped a handkerchief in his mouth, the other seized his rifle and throwing it in among the spruces, proceeded to tie his hands.

Dick was a prisoner before he knew where he was. Three other men now joined the others.

They were as tough a looking lot as Dick had ever seen.

"Hustle him, Jim Rayburn! Hustle him!" whispered the man who did the tying. "Get him quiet as quick as you can and lay for the others."

The man who had lassoed poor Dick wound the rope over his arm and started off among the spruces, leading Dick as if he had been a horse or a mule, the others following.

We need scarcely say that Dick was terribly chagrined, still there was worse to come, as he was very soon to find out.

Leaving Dick to follow his leader, we must return for a few moments to the wicky-ups.

Ned, Edith and the Unknown were sleeping peacefully here, relying upon Dick to do the watching.

It was strange that Ned should take to dreaming, as he did just then.

When we tell his dream it will scarcely be believed, and yet we can only state facts.

Ned dreamed he suddenly awoke and could hear a rustling of a woman's dress outside the wicky-up.

This bothered him. He thought that he ought to get outside and see what the sound meant, but when he tried to do so, found to his horror, that he could not move hand nor foot.

Then it seemed to him that he saw the girl, Maggie Maxwell, come stealing into the wicky-up.

She looked at him as he lay there asleep—Ned could see himself sleeping—and then looked at the Unknown.

This did not seem to satisfy her, for she drew back and passed into the other wicky-up where Edith slept.

The brush wall which divided the two shelters was no bar to Ned's seeing all this.

He could look right into the other wicky-up, and see the girl bending over Edith.

"Wake up! Wake up!" she called. "There's danger in sleeping here!"

Then instantly Ned was broad awake himself and sitting up in his blankets.

The dream was so vivid that he could not believe that it was other than real, and he sprang to his feet, threw aside the blankets and seizing his rifle ran into the other wicky-up to see Edith sitting up and staring about.

"Ned! Oh, Ned! What is it? Where is she?" gasped Edith, not much more than half awake.

"The girl—did you see her?" cried Ned.

"Yes, yes! She was here! She shook me and woke me up! Where has she gone?"

"Get up quick, Edith; there's something wrong here!" cried Ned. "Either both of us have been dreaming, or that Maxwell girl was in a second ago."

He ran into the other wicky-up, shook up the Unknown and, without waiting to explain, rushed outside to look for Dick, who, of course, was not to be seen.

"Dick! Dick!" he shouted. "Where are you, Dick?"

"Ye gods and little fishes, what's the matter now?" cried the Unknown, who with rifle in hand came stumbling out of the wicky-up.

"Dick has gone! There's been somebody prowling about the camp!"

"Who?"

"A girl—looked like Maggie Maxwell."

"Did you see her?"

"I either saw her or dreamed it. Edith saw her, though."

"Yes, I'm sure I did," said Edith, coming out now. "I was awakened by somebody shaking me, and when I opened my eyes, there was that Maxwell girl looking right into my face. 'You want to get up and defend yourselves,' was what she said to me. 'My father has betrayed you! You will all be murdered in your sleep!'"

"Exactly what I dreamed!" said Ned.

"Probably you didn't dream it; probably you saw her," said the detective.



"Impossible! How could I see through that wall of brush?"

"Dick! We must find Dick!" cried the Unknown, and off he started for the timber line.

Ned started to follow, but the Unknown shouted back:

"Stay there and look out for Edith and the gold!"

Cocking his rifle so as to be ready for instant action, Ned held back, and the Unknown disappeared among the spruces.

Crack, bang!

Two shots and a shout came from among the spruces then, and all at once four men rushed out into the open and began blazing away.

If it had been daylight, it would have been all up with Young Klondike and Edith in an instant; that is if these men meant to kill, which perhaps is doubtful.

Ned fired for business, but it went for nothing.

He managed to get in two shots, when there came a rush from behind, and three men jumped upon them.

Ned's rifle was wrenched from his hand and he found himself sprawling on the ground in a twinkling.

One of the men—he was a perfect giant, seized Edith roughly, and hustled her off to the timber line.

It was no use for Ned to struggle. They had him fast.

The two men held him in a grip of iron, and others came running out of the timber. There were six altogether.

Among them was old man Maxwell, who carried a lantern.

"That's Young Klondike," he cried. "That's the fellow who stole my claim! Hold him, boys, till we can get the gold!"

They flocked to the wicky-up and easily discovering where the gold was hidden, began to bring out the bags.

In dumb despair Ned watched them as they carried bag after bag in among the timber.

There was nothing to be done, no chance to help himself.

Three times the men came back to the camp, and three times they left it loaded down with gold.

Soon the last bag had been taken.

All this time old man Maxwell kept the light on Ned.

He chuckled as he saw the bags go, and kept saying:

"What did I tell you? I'll get square with you. I said so, and I always do what I say."

But Ned never answered.

Talk would have done no good; besides, he was too much overpowered to speak.

"All gone!" cried one of the men, as they returned after taking away the last bag.

"Then kill the snoozer!" cried old Maxwell, viciously. "That was the bargain! Kill him now!"

"Is this your gratitude?" gasped Ned. "I saved

your life, old man, and I saved your daughter's life! Do you forget the night of the storm?"

"Forget nothing!" cried Maxwell. "This claim is mine and I mean to fight for it. Kill him, boys, before his infernal luck steps in to save him. Anyhow we've made our pile."

"Hold your jaw, old man! We propose to finish the job without you urging us on," growled one of the gang.

And he added:

"Stand him up against the bush there, boys. We'll bore a hole through him and send the bullet out on the other side."

## CHAPTER VI.

### CAUGHT ON THE LEDGE.

CRACK! Crack! Twice the rifle spoke. Two shots went whirling toward Young Klondike.

Ned gave a sharp cry, and throwing up his hands, pitched forward on his face and lay as still as death upon the frozen ground.

"That settles him!" cried old Maxwell, jubilantly. "We've snuffed out the young upstart. Now, then, boys, let's get off to Dawson with the gold!"

They all seemed to take it for granted that Ned had been killed first fire, and so indeed it looked.

Nothing of the sort.

Young Klondike was as brave as they make 'em, and foxy, too.

When they stood him with his back to the wicky-up and prepared to fire, Ned saw that the only chance to save himself was to keep his wits about him and play 'possum.

It was a slim chance, too.

If those first shots proved fatal, then the game was up and there was no hope.

But they didn't.

Where they went to Ned never knew. It was enough that they didn't go into him.

"Here's my chance," thought Ned to himself, and he dropped flat.

It was the luckiest thing he ever did, for it saved his life.

Lying perfectly still, scarcely daring to breathe, Ned waited for the men to go.

He did not dare to jump up the moment he found himself alone, either; it would have been mere madness to do that.

He waited until the last sound of their footsteps had died away, and then slowly crawled to his feet.

Nothing happened. Ned stood listening, but all was still.

It is easy to imagine his feelings now.

It seemed as if everything worth having in life had suddenly been taken from him.

Of all the startling shocks which had come to



Young Klondike since he began his career up here in this wild region, this was probably the worst.

"They've carried off Edith and they have probably shot poor Dick," he thought. "As for Zed, I don't suppose there is a ghost of a chance that he is still alive."

Filled with these dismal thoughts, Young Klondike crept toward the timber line.

He had scarcely entered the spruces when he discovered that he had a definite trail to work on.

There was still snow here among the trees, and the footsteps of the gang were very plainly marked.

They led toward the mountainside, and Ned was just smart enough to know what this probably meant.

On the other side of the mountain lay El Dorado creek.

Any one following this trail over the mountain would not only come to the creek, but would strike it far below the Young Klondike mine, in fact, almost at its point of union with Bonanza creek.

Chances were that Bonanza creek was still open, although the upper part of El Dorado was closed for the winter when Ned left the mine.

"So they mean to take that gold to Dawson, do they?" thought Ned; "that means Edith, too. I must keep cool. No use in breaking down, bad and all as it is. There's work to be done for Edith, if nothing else."

Bitter thoughts were in Young Klondike's mind as he followed that trail through the snow.

He expected nothing but to stumble over Dick's dead body every step, or it might be the Unknown.

With noiseless tread he pushed his way on, and came out at the mountain's foot.

Here the ascent was abrupt, but the trail went on up over the rocks.

Ned paused and looked up, catching sight of a light far above him.

Watching it closely he saw that it came from a lantern, moving along against the side of the mountain about two hundred feet up.

At first he could see no one, but as he watched dark shadows seemed to stand out against the rocks.

"There they go," he thought. "That's the trail over the mountain. Probably they know all about it. Oh, the scoundrels! I—thunder! what was that?"

It was a curious noise close beside him.

It sounded like the stifled cry of some animal, and then faint blows were struck.

Ned's heart almost stood still.

He was unarmed, and the startling events of the night had rendered him terribly nervous.

Again the cry was heard, and the pounding noise came with it.

Of course it was necessary to know what this meant, and Ned turned in among the spruces.

He at once saw that he still had a trail, but whether it was the main trail or not, of course he could not tell, for one went up the mountainside and there was the light to consider, too.

As he crept on the mystery suddenly explained itself, for Ned caught sight of a dusky figure standing against a tree.

It was Dick!

Dark as it was, Ned recognized him as he crept nearer.

Dick was tied to the tree and was kicking his feet against it, calling out the best he could with a handkerchief in his mouth.

Of course Ned rushed to his assistance the instant he made this welcome discovery.

"Oh, Dick! Dick! how could you let them do it?" he groaned, as he cut the cords which bound the boy to the tree.

Poor Dick couldn't speak until he got the handkerchief out of his mouth, but he made it up after that.

"Ned, don't blame me," he groaned. "It's bad enough without that. They caught me foul. I thought I should go mad here, but I've got a new grip on myself, now that I know you are alive. Where's Edith? Where's the Unknown? Great Scott, do speak up, and tell me what has occurred."

By the time Dick knew all that Ned had to tell they were well up on the side of the mountain, still following the trail.

It was hard work in the darkness, but the stars helped on a great deal, and it must be remembered that up in the Klondike country people get used to traveling in the dark.

"So it was old Maxwell, was it?" said Dick. "The ungrateful skunk! I didn't see him, though I thought I heard his voice once. Wonder why they didn't kill me, or at least try?"

"Didn't you see anything of them after they first tied you up?" asked Ned.

"Not a thing. I heard them coming and going though, and I imagined that an attack had been made on the camp. You can just imagine my feelings, Ned. Heavens! I thought I should go raving mad when I heard one of them say that they'd killed Young Klondike. If it had been true they might as well have killed me, too, for I shouldn't have cared to live without you."

"Don't say that," replied Ned; "we've got Edith to think of now."

"And Zed."

"I don't forget him. We may be leaving the poor fellow's dead body behind us. If the Unknown had been alive it seems to me that he would have made some sign before this."

They hurried on as fast as the rugged nature of their path would permit.

At last they came out upon a narrow ledge, which ran on under great overhanging cliffs.

They were far up on the mountainside now, and there was snow everywhere on it that it had a chance to lodge.

On the ledge there was plenty of it, and the trail was plainer than ever.

"We ought to have a good chance to overtake them," declared Ned. "They are loaded down with



the gold and we are light. I really don't see how they can escape us; still there has been a good deal of time lost."

"We'll get there, don't you worry."

"I ain't worrying. I'm only thinking. My idea is that this ledge may take a turn soon. I expect to come in sight of them at any moment."

Ned was entirely right, for this was just what they did.

Suddenly the ledge wound around a beetling cliff, and then they saw the light right ahead of them.

Here was a large semi-circular space in among the cliffs. It was level and sheltered; just the spot for a camp.

A fire was burning on the snow, and they could see dark figures moving about it, as they peered around the corner of the cliff.

"Hold up!" whispered Dick. "There's their camp."

"Sure enough! Can you make out anything?"

"No, I can't! Lots of them there, though."

"How many of the gang were there altogether?"

"Oh, there seemed to be a lot of them coming and going. You must remember that I was in among the trees, so I can't be sure."

"They've tied up here for the night all right, though."

"So they have. We've got to get into that camp, Ned."

"You bet, if Edith is there, and I have no doubt she is."

"Wish I was sure of it."

"We can only find out by sneaking up and having a closer look."

But the time hadn't come to go then.

They crept on along under the cliffs, but before they had gone ten feet further a man suddenly sprang out from among the broken rocks, which here formed the side of the cliff, and confronted them.

"Halt! Stand your ground!" he said, in a deep voice, throwing up a rifle at the same time.

It would have been startling enough if it had been anybody else but the Unknown.

There the little detective was as large as life, and not hurt a bit.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, what a scare you gave me, boys!" he exclaimed. "I thought I was hemmed in by the enemy, sure."

"Don't say anything about that. I thought I'd got to shoot someone," replied Ned. "So you are ahead of us, it seems!"

"Of course. Ain't I always in the lead?"

"Where in thunder have you been? Why didn't you come back? Don't you know those fellows have carried off Edith, and they came near killing me?"

"Don't talk, Ned; I know all about it. Do you think I could have failed to come if I'd had the chance? You ought to know me better than that, dear boy."

"Did they get you, Zed?"

"Of course they did. Didn't you hear the shot?"

"Yes. Were you hit?"

"No! They jumped on me, though, and had me a prisoner so quick that I didn't know where I was at. Oh, Ned, I tell you it was tough to stand there tied up to a tree and see them take Edith past, and then go with the gold; but the worst of all was when I heard them say they had killed you. Burn that man Maxwell! He's the most ungrateful snoozer I ever heard of; all the same he don't know how to tie knots, not for a little bit. If it hadn't been for that I might have been tied to the tree still, instead of being here now. See that light?"

The Unknown pointed to the fire as he wound up this long speech.

"That's their camp," said Dick.

"That's what it is. Don't stop to tell your story, boys. It's enough for me to know that you are alive. Edith is over there and she's got to be rescued. As for the gold, let it go to grass if we can't get that dear girl away from those scoundrels."

"You are sure?" asked Ned.

"Positive."

"See her now?"

"No; but I was up very close to the camp a few moments ago and I saw her then."

"What was she doing?"

"Lying on the snow wrapped up in a blanket. Maxwell's daughter was with her. Oh, the ungrateful hussy! I'd like to wring her neck!"

"Perhaps she can't help herself. I haven't told you what that girl did for Edith yet."

"I think we may safely put Maggie down as all right," said the detective, when Ned told what happened in the wicky-ups.

While they were talking they stood watching the fire.

They could distinctly see all that was going on there in the hollow, but were perfectly safe themselves.

The men seemed to be settling down to sleep.

One by one they rolled themselves up in their blankets and lay down around the fire until only three remained awake.

These three sat together smoking and talking, and it did seem as though they would never quit.

At last two of them gave it up, and "went to roost," as the detective expressed it.

"Now is certainly our time if it's ever coming," said the Unknown. "Boys, we've got to act."

"I'm more than ready," replied Ned. "I suppose it's a case of sneaking into that camp and doing the rescue act."

"That's what it is. Are you game for it, Dick?"

"Don't ask me a question like that, or I shall be tempted to pitch you off the ledge," replied Dick. "Game for it! Of course I'm game for anything that will help Edith now."

The words were scarcely spoken when all hands were startled by a sharp, cracking sound like the report of a pistol.



"A shot!" gasped Ned. "Someone has his eye on us, then!"

"Not on your life! That's no shot!" said the detective. "It's a more serious business, I'm afraid."

"What do you mean?" asked Dick.

"Not cracking of the rocks!" said Ned. "You don't mean that the ledge is breaking away?"

Now this was exactly what the detective meant, and he said so.

Up in the Klondike country where the cold is so intense, seams and fissures are always opening in the rocky ledges, and not infrequently there occur tremendous landslides and cave-ins.

Young Klondike had been through several experiences of this kind, and he knew just how serious a matter it was liable to be.

Here they were standing on a narrow ledge of rock with towering cliffs above them, and a precipice of fully two hundred feet extending down into the valley below.

The width of this ledge was not over twenty feet in the widest place.

Should it break in front of them they would be cut off from Edith entirely. Should it break behind their own retreat would be cut off, which might be just as serious; so taken altogether it was anything but a pleasant prospect here.

Again the cracking sound was heard, and still again.

After that all was quiet, but the last two cracks were unmistakable.

The sounds came from the rocks, whatever they might mean.

"Pshaw! There's no use bothering our heads about this," said the Unknown. "It may not amount to anything after all. Now's our time, and so here goes! Single file, boys! Follow me!"

They stole on into the hollow, keeping well under the shadow of the rocks and crept on, until they came opposite the fire, using the greatest care to prevent the guard from catching sight of them.

Long before they reached this place, they saw that the guard was old Maxwell himself. He was pacing up and down before the fire, carrying a rifle in his hand.

Of course there was nothing very formidable in the old man, but the trouble was about the rifle. How to get around it they did not know.

"If we shoot, the whole camp will be up in arms in a moment," said the detective, "and if he shoots at us it will be just the same."

"How many do you make of them, Zed?" asked Dick.

"I couldn't make more than twelve," replied the detective, "but that's enough and don't you forget it."

"Too many for us to tackle if they all come down upon us at once," said Ned. "This is a case where one man can do better than a dozen. I'm going up there to the fire. I'm going to do the job alone."

"Young Klondike, are you crazy?" demanded the detective.

"Not at all. I only mean to succeed."

"You mean to make a failure and to lose your life into the bargain. Have you forgotten that these scoundrels have already tried to kill you once? I'm the man to try this job single handed if it is to be tried that way at all."

"Hush! Not another word. I'm going, and I'm going now."

Stepping out boldly from the shadow of the rocks, Young Klondike made a bee line for the fire.

The detective would have followed, but Dick held him back.

"You've got to let Ned have his own way," he said. "He'll never be satisfied unless you do."

"I'll stay," said the Unknown, "but it is only because I see now that I can help him more. Still, I'm the one who ought to have gone."

With the bright fire before him and the dark background of the rocks behind, Ned was practically invisible.

He had counted on that when he made the move.

On the other hand old Maxwell, with the fire behind him, could be seen with perfect distinctness, and the Unknown would hold him covered, as Ned well knew.

This was his object in making the move. He could use his revolver, and at the same time have his hands practically free. So Ned went on through the snow. Fortune favored him not a little.

Maxwell was walking away from the fire when he started.

Then he stopped to fix his moccasin, and that took time.

Meanwhile Ned gained the fire and dropped flat on the snow, crawling on noiselessly with his eyes open for Edith.

Maxwell was on the other side of the fire and did not see him; so far, all was well.

But where was Edith? That was the question.

Ned glanced back. He could not see either Dick or the Unknown, it was so dark there under the rocks.

The sleeping men lay all around him. He saw the bags of gold banked up against the cliffs with a blanket thrown partly over them. Between the pile of bags and the cliff there was a narrow space. Ned wondered if Edith could be there.

Just then Maxwell looked his way, and he had to wait a moment. Then the old scoundrel turned and walked off again, and Ned improved the opportunity by dragging himself up to the bags.

He had made no mistake. Edith lay behind them. The poor girl was tied hand and foot. She raised her head as Ned looked over the bags.

"Hist, Edith! Don't say a word!" he breathed. "I'm here to save you now."

He drew his knife and wriggled around behind the bags, cutting the cords which held Edith captive.



"Are you free now? Are there any more?" he whispered, when this was done.

"All free, Ned. Oh, do be careful! They'll kill you if they catch you."

"Which I don't intend they shall do. Now, Edith, listen to me."

"I'm listening, Ned."

"We've got to make a strike for freedom, and it must be a bold one to succeed."

"I'm ready for anything."

"Then when I say the word spring up and run for your life over toward the cliff, where Zed and Dick are waiting. I'll protect you with my revolver, and the Unknown has a rifle. We've only old Maxwell to deal with, and we are sure to succeed."

"I'm all ready, Ned."

"Then now is the time. Here we go!"

They sprang up and Edith ran at full speed toward the cliff.

The movement was almost noiseless, and yet Maxwell saw them.

Instantly he fired, at the same time shouting to the men to wake up.

Ned threw up his revolver and got in two shots, and the Unknown's rifle cracked, too, as they ran for dear life toward the cliffs.

It looked as though a fight was on hand then, for several of the men were on their feet in a twinkling.

"What's the row? What is it? Where are they?" they could hear them shout.

"There they go! The girl has escaped. It's Young Klondike! He's alive!" shouted Maxwell, firing again.

By this time Edith and Ned had gained the shadow of the cliffs.

"Saved!" cried the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, you've done it, Young Klondike. Now for the retreat, and may Heaven help us to hold our own!"

They ran back on the narrow ledge, rounded the corner of the rocks and hurried on.

"They are following us," said Dick. "No use! We've got to fight for it."

"And who says we can't do it?" cried the detective. "Here, Edith, you get forward with Dick; Ned and I will do the defensive act."

The words were scarcely spoken when everybody was startled by a noise like the discharge of a cannon.

"Ye gods and little fishes! The rocks are going!" gasped the detective.

It was so! They had already gone as he spoke.

With a thunderous noise the ledge right in front of them slipped away from the cliffs, and went crashing down into the valley with a rush and a roar which seemed to shake the mountain to its very foundations.

"Caught on the ledge, by thunder!" gasped the Unknown. "We can neither advance nor retreat!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### IN THE CAVE OF GOLD.

"SURRENDER! We've got you now! Surrender to the Boomers of Raccoon creek, or we'll shoot every one of you dead where you stand!"

The gang were just coming round the corner of the rocks when the ledge fell, and as Young Klondike's party stood there holding on to each other, they could hear the shouts.

"Hold on to Edith, Dick!" cried Ned. "We'll fight till the last!"

Crack! went his revolver, and a man dropped on the ledge.

Perhaps this would have made matters worse for them if the situation had not suddenly changed, for the answer was a shower of rifle balls which came whirling about their heads.

Fortunately there was no damage done, and before the shots could be repeated another thunderous crack broke upon their ears.

The noise was deafening, and was followed by profound silence.

"Gee whiz! the whole mountain is coming down!" they heard one of the men shout, and the whole gang ran back around the turn in the rocks as fast as their legs could carry them.

"We've got to follow!" cried Ned. "It's death to remain here!"

He started to run, but the Unknown caught him and held him back.

Even this did not save him.

Instantly there was another crash and down went another section of the ledge from the turn in the cliffs up to where Ned stood.

The rocks slipped from under his feet, but the Unknown still stood on firm footing—stood struggling with all his might to hold Ned up, but it was no use.

The boy slipped away from him and went whirling down into the abyss with one wild heart-rending cry.

"Oh, Ned! Ned!" cried the Unknown. He dropped on his knees, buried his face in his hands and groaned.

Dick and Edith stood together, holding on to each other, overcome with the awful horror of the event.

Ned was gone, and there was no telling at what instant they might be called upon to follow him. Two sections of the ledge had been carried down, and it seemed altogether probable that what was left would soon go, too.

Such was the situation when, to the immense relief of all, Ned's voice was heard calling from below.

"Hello, up there! Hello!" the shout came.

"Oh, hear him!" cried Dick, and Edith gave a glad shout.

The Unknown was on his feet in an instant.

"Ned, Ned!" he called, in a voice loud enough to have reached the "Boomers of Raccoon creek," around the bend in the cliff.

"I'm all right up to the present time!" answered



Ned, coolly enough. "I can hold on here for an hour if necessary, but all the same I'd like to get up."

"Look down and see if you can see him, Zed!" cried Edith. "Oh, be quick!"

The detective dropped flat on the snow and peered over the edge.

Ned was about ten feet below him standing on a narrow projection of the cliff, formed by the new creek.

It was an awful position. Not one in ten thousand could have held their own there so.

But Ned was one of the cool kind. He had landed on this narrow footing and managed to hold his place. He intended to keep on holding it to the last gasp, and his very coolness made his friends cool too.

"All right up there?" he called, cheerfully.

"That's what we are," replied the detective. "Everything seems firm enough here. What are we to do for you?"

"Get me up."

"With a rope it would be easy, but as it is, I don't see how we are going to do it."

"I do."

"Tell it, then. If it costs my life I'll try."

"It won't cost your life if you are cool. Let down your legs; I can climb up over you."

"Can't hold on, Ned. No use talking!" groaned the Unknown.

"Dick can hold you, and Edith can hold Dick. With those two pulling against us we ought to be able to make it go."

The Unknown shuddered.

It was not for himself that he feared, however, and he instantly gave in.

"I'll try it," he said, quietly, "but if one of us goes the other goes."

"If you're afraid, don't try it."

"It ain't that I'm afraid for myself. It's for you, Ned."

"Never mind me. I'm a-goner if I stay here."

"It must be done," said Dick. "If you won't try it, Zed, I will."

"Your legs are longer, Dick. You're taller than I am, and I'm ever so much stronger than you."

It was perfectly evident that the Unknown was right, and without another word Dick stepped in front of him.

"Here, take my hands," he said. "Edith, you get hold of the Unknown and pull back for all you are worth."

It was an awful moment.

When Dick felt Ned's grip on his legs he thought he would faint, but he fought it off and clutched the Unknown's hands for dear life.

Little by little, inch by inch, Young Klondike pulled himself up over Dick.

Edith had to turn her head away; she could not look at him. One slip meant death, but the slip did not come.

When Edith looked again there was Ned sitting on the snow, and the Unknown was pulling Dick up.

The poor boy had fainted now. He would have dropped into the abyss if the Unknown had not kept tight hold of his hands.

It took them all some moments to cool off, and by that time Dick was himself again.

"Safe for the instant," said the Unknown, cheerfully. "Now, then, let's imagine it's all right, and going to stay so. Boys, what shall we do?"

"Wait for daylight," said Ned, in his quiet way. "We can't do anything else. There's no use trying. We've just got to take it easy, and accept the situation as it is."

"And if the ledge falls?" suggested Dick, with a shudder.

"Then we all go together. Now not another word about it. I'm going to take it easy while I can."

Fancy taking it easy under such circumstances as these!

But they had to. From that time on until daylight came they remained there on the ledge, sometimes crouching on the snow, sometimes pacing up and down to try and keep the deathly chill from striking in too deep.

It was an awful night, take it how you will, and morning brought no relief except that it was now light and they could see their terrible position and understand it better.

Toward the camp of the boomers the rock had fallen away so as to leave almost a straight edge on a line with what remained, but with the other side it was different.

Here a mass of the cliff above had fallen, and they could not look around into the opening, but the rocks were so ragged that Ned declared he could climb around the turn and see just how matters stood, although this seemed a dreadful undertaking, and one not likely to do much good.

Even an adventure with the boomers was to be preferred to this, the Unknown declared, and he proposed to call for help and appeal to the enemy to lend them a hand.

"I wouldn't," said Edith, very emphatically. "They are a hard lot. You just ought to have heard them talk! There's one fellow there named Jim Rayburn, who is particularly down on you, Ned. He declared that he would never rest until he had run us out of the valley. You ought to have heard him! It was awful! I never heard such talk in my life!"

"Why, what have I ever done to bring about this kind of feeling?" replied Ned.

"Oh, he's an Anarchist. He's down on all rich men."

"I suppose he wouldn't mind making a million himself, though?"

"Not a bit, but I guess he prefers stealing our gold to digging?"

"Where did they all come from, anyhow?"

"From what I heard them say, I think they've got a camp further up the mountain. They've been prospecting around one place and another, Maggie Maxwell told me. The poor girl was real good to me.



She tried her best to save us from this attack, and really risked her life coming into our camp the way she did."

"Then you don't think it would pay us to call them, Edith?"

"I'm sure it wouldn't, even if they are still there, which I very much doubt."

"That settles it, then. Something has got to be done, though. I'm going to risk it on that wall. It might be that the rocks are so broken away that we could climb up to the top of the cliffs around the bend here."

It was useless to try to stop Ned, now that he had once made up his mind to make the attempt.

It was a fearful thing to see him clinging to those rocks like a fly, and working his way around the corner, and yet after all it was not so very dangerous if one could only keep his head.

Ned did it all right, and he had no sooner turned the bend than he made a great discovery.

There was a cave here.

The fall of the rocks had taken the back clean out of it.

Six steps brought him into the cave, and his friends, who had been listening breathlessly, were overjoyed to hear his glad shout.

"I've struck it! I've struck it!" he cried. "Hur-ray! We are safe!"

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I knew relief would come with the daylight!" cried the detective. "What have you struck, dear boy?"

"A cave! A big one! Come round here, Zed; it's no trick."

The detective lost no time trying it.

Planting his feet in the hollows of the broken cliff, he worked his way around, clutching the projections of rock above, and in a moment was standing in the cave alongside of Ned.

Edith followed, and then came Dick.

Their spirits rose immensely now. It seemed as if all danger had passed.

The cave was about twenty feet wide, and extended off into the cliff as far as they could see.

"There must be some outlet to this," said the detective. "Of course it can't run on forever without a break."

"What's this? What's this?" cried Dick, making a dart across the cave just then.

He stopped and picked up a big nugget.

"More gold!" cried Edith.

"A case of gold!" echoed the detective. "Look, boys! The floor here is strewn with nuggets. We've struck it rich again! This is a veritable cave of gold!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### NED FALLS INTO THE HANDS OF THE BOOMERS.

It was certainly a big discovery.

There was a great number of those golden nuggets, big and little scattered about the floor of the cave.

But if there had been a million in sight, Young Klondike and his friends would have cheerfully exchanged it all for freedom just about that time.

"We can't stop for gold now," said the Unknown; "what we want to do is to push on and see if we can't find some way out of this."

They walked on then, leaving the gold behind them, not even taking so much as a single specimen.

As they advanced the cave grew narrower. It had a downward tendency; they were evidently descending the mountain, but after covering about two hundred yards they suddenly came up against a wall of rock and could go no further.

"Floored again!" exclaimed the detective, "but if there was only someone up there with a rope we would be all right."

There was light shining in upon them overhead through a jagged opening in the rocks. This opening was about twenty feet up, just high enough to be entirely out of reach, and the detective gazed upon it with a despairing face.

"So near and yet so far!" he exclaimed. "We are cornered here, boys, and I don't see—by the Jumping Jeremiah, what's that?"

It was startling enough under the circumstances.

Suddenly the entrance to the cave was darkened, and a face looked down upon them.

"Maggie Maxwell!" cried Edith, recognizing the old prospector's daughter at a glance.

"Are you there, Miss Welton?" called the girl. "Is that you who spoke?"

"Yes, yes!" answered Edith. "Oh, Maggie! You tried your best to help us before—help us now!"

"Hush! Not so loud! You are within fifty feet of the boomers' camp. If they knew you were here I can do nothing for you, but as it is I'm going to try."

"That's the talk!" exclaimed the Unknown. "You help us, sister, and we'll do the right thing by you, and don't you forget it! Have you got a rope?"

"There's ropes in the camp, but I can't get them now."

"Got to wait till night?" asked Ned. "Better do it if it will make our chances better. We can hold out till then."

"I suppose it would be safer, but perhaps he won't have to. They are bringing the gold over the ridge. Just now they are most all in the camp, but they'll go back in a minute. Wait! I'll call you up again."

Then the face disappeared and a long wait followed. It was anything but agreeable to know that relief was so near and yet so far.

The Unknown paced the floor of the cave uneasily, and they discussed the situation until it was worn threadbare. At last the opening above was darkened again.

"Are you still there?" called the girl. "Remember I can't see you down there in the dark, although I suppose you can see me plain enough."



"We are all here," replied Ned. "Have they gone now?"

"They've started. I only so hope some of them won't take a notion to come back again."

"Perhaps you'd better wait?"

"No, no! Then they'll return. Whatever is to be done must be done now."

The face disappeared for an instant and then a rope came tumbling down through the hole.

"Now is your time!" called the girl. "I've made the other end of this rope fast around a tree. I can't pull you up—I ain't strong enough, but if one of you could climb up he might pull the others. I've done all I can do."

"I'm good for that!" cried Ned. "How did you know we were here, Maggie?"

"Heard your voices," replied the girl. "We knew there was a cave here, and when I heard the talking I suspected where it came from, don't you see?"

"I see that you have come to our help just in time, and don't you forget it, you will be well rewarded for this."

"I don't want any reward," replied the girl, feelingly. "I'm only doing for you what you did for me and my father. I'm ashamed of father. I knew he was a bad man, but I didn't think he was the ungrateful one he has shown himself to be."

"Never mind! You're all right. I'm coming now. You are sure the rope is fast?"

"Oh, yes. It can't slip. Come on!"

Ned seized the rope and climbed up hand over hand.

In a moment he was out of the cave and found himself standing upon the edge of a broad level stretch, well wooded with stunted fir trees. There was a log cabin at no great distance away.

"Now for the others," he cried. "Maggie, you're a brick! I shall never forget you! Dick, catch on to that rope!"

He shook the rope, and when Dick's weight was felt at the other end, he gave it a hearty pull.

All at once he felt it part, and heard Dick fall back to the floor of the cave.

"Thunder! That's a bad job!" gasped Ned. "Are you hurt, Dick?"

"Not a bit! Confound the rotten old thing! What are we going to do now?"

"There's more rope in the hut," said Maggie. "I'll go and get it."

"I'll go," said Ned. "It won't take me as long as it does you."

Never in all his life did Young Klondike make a bigger mistake, although perhaps in the end it would have come out just the same.

He ran to the hut which was fitted up with rude benches inside, and had just succeeded in finding the rope when suddenly the door was darkened by three men.

It was Jim Rayburn, Corney Brown and another. Young Klondike recognized the two who had tried to kill him, and it is unnecessary to say that they knew him at a glance.

"Thunder and guns! Why, it's Young Klondike?" cried Rayburn. "The dead come back to life again! How the burning blue blazes did you come here?"

It took Ned just about one second to come to the conclusion that the thing for him to do was to conceal the presence of his friends in the cave.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, quietly, "what's the use in you and I quarreling. I'm here and you've got the drop on me—that's all."

"Well, I should say we had got the drop on you," growled Jim Rayburn. "Throw up your hands if you want to live."

Ned dropped the rope and threw up his hands.

"Does this mean a funeral?" he asked.

"It ought to," replied Rayburn. "It may before we get through with it. I'd like to know how you got here first, when we thought you lying dead at the bottom of the cliff. Hang me, Young Klondike, if you haven't got as many lives as my grandmother's cat."

"I might have been dead and I don't know why I ain't, but all the same I did manage to climb up over the rocks."

"That's more than I can believe. Where's the rest of your gang?"

"How can I tell?"

"They went down?"

"Yes, they are down now. I can't help it. I've got all I can do to look out for myself."

"Well, it's a thundering pity you didn't go with them, you young monopolizer of mines. Do you think you own the earth? Ain't you satisfied to leave us poor boomers this one little claim here on Raccoon creek? No, by time, you ain't satisfied. You want it all."

It was amazing with what bitterness the man spoke.

"Stow that," growled Corney Brown. "We want to know what brought this fellow here."

"I've told you all there is to tell about that," said Ned. "It was a mere accident. After I came up the rocks I was wandering about, and I struck this place—that is all."

"Then I say kill him off-hand," said Corney Brown. "Let's have no more bloody nonsense about it—kill him now."

Perhaps Jim Rayburn might have been inclined to do this on his own account if he had been let alone, but like a good many other people he did not relish being dictated to by anyone else.

"Whose boss of the boomers, you or me, Corney Brown?" he demanded, with a surly growl.

"Well, you are, Jim. I don't deny that."

"Exactly so. Let me boss this job, then. You know what I am—I'm an Anarchist. You know what we all are—we are all Anarchists, straight Chicago brand. We came out here to make a leveling of things, and to do that we've got to get our hands on money. We've got our hands on money—Young Klondike's money, and now we are not only going to hold on to that, but we are going to get our hooks on



the Raccoon creek claim, too, blessings on that old idiot of a Maxwell for telling us about it! That's what we're up to, Corney, and when we've done that we'll make Young Klondike shell out some of his mun, say a million or so, for the good of the cause. Now, then, ain't that better than killing him—say?"

"I don't know but what it is," growled Corney. "Anyhow, you are boss, and I suppose you'll have your way."

Ned listened to all this with a sinking heart.

These boomers, then, were nothing more nor less than a gang of Anarchists, who had their own peculiar ideas about a young man making as many millions as he had been lucky to make.

To give away the secret of the cave to such men, would only bring on trouble, especially to Edith, for whatever their motive might have been in capturing her, it existed still.

"They'll have to stay where they are for the present, that's sure," thought Ned, "and there's another thing certain they ain't very likely to get away without my help."

He could see through the open door that Maggie Maxwell had vanished. Probably the girl had gone into the woods upon seeing the men return, he thought, and he was quite right.

Maggie, seeing what had happened, and knowing that she could do no good by remaining near the mouth of the cave, very wisely took herself out of the way.

"Well, what do you propose to do with me?" asked Ned. "You fellows have got a lot to say, but I don't care to stand here with my hands up just the same."

"We are going to put you where you'll be safe until we get through bringing those gold bags of yours over here," replied Rayburn—"that's what we are going to do with you, young man. As for the rest, you have heard my plan, if you ain't deaf, and I propose to see that it's carried out."

He winked at Corney Brown, and they seized Ned and hustled him out of the hut and over toward the mouth of the cave, the other man remaining at the hut.

It dawned upon Ned at once that it was their intention to drop him down through the opening, and he was glad of it. At least he would be back with his friends again. The only thing that bothered him now was the fear that Maggie had left the end of the broken rope fastened to the tree.

"If that's there then we are dead given away, and I'm sure I don't know what I shall do," thought Ned, as they drew near the cave.

It was there.

Corney Brown caught sight of it first.

"Who tied that rope to the tree?" he sung out.

"Why, it's one of our ropes," added Rayburn. "Sure enough! Who did?"

"Of course it's our rope, whose else would it be?" demanded Corney. "This is treachery, this is. I say

kill Young Klondike at once, and save more trouble in the end."

He turned fiercely on Ned and seized him by the throat, at the same time drawing a revolver and pressing it against his breast.

"What do you know about this rope?" he demanded, fiercely. "Speak up or you die! What do you know about the rope?"

## CHAPTER IX.

### NED CAPTURES THE BOSS BOOMERS AND MAKES THEM WORK.

ANYBODY but Young Klondike would have been inclined to give up in despair at this sudden turning of the tables, or at least to have said something in his excitement that would have brought death.

Ned kept perfectly cool.

"What do I know about your old rope?" he demanded. "Let go of my throat—you're choking me."

"Let go!" said Jim Rayburn, "what are you musing with the prisoner for, Corney? Let him speak."

Corney put up his revolver, because Jim drew his, and flourished it threateningly.

Then they began quarreling together, and this gave Ned time to think.

A bright idea came to him all of a sudden, and he instantly determined to carry it out if possible.

"If you fellows will hold your jawing a minute and listen to me, I'll tell you something about that rope," he calmly said.

"Well, tell it then," growled Corney, "I knew blame well that you knew something about it—for didn't we catch you with a rope in your hand?"

"Exactly! I was going down into that hole to see what I could find."

"The deuce you were! What does that mean?"

"Just that I thought I heard someone talking down there."

"Impossible! It's only a cave."

"I didn't suppose it was anything else. Listen and you'll hear them talking now."

Ned spoke these words as loud as possible. He wanted Dick and the Unknown to hear, and he knew them well enough to be sure that they would instantly imagine that he had some scheme on hand, and try to help him carry it out.

Immediately the voices were heard, the Unknown and Dick could be depended upon, it seemed.

Rayburn and Corney looked astonished.

"Blamed if there ain't someone down there!" said Corney; "yet I don't see how that can be."

"Can you see anything down there?" asked Ned innocently.

Rayburn and Corney leaned over the hole and looked down.

This was just the chance Ned was looking for.



With one quick movement he gave both a violent push, and down they went into the hole.

"Grab 'em, Dick! Hold 'em, Zed!" he cried. "Don't let them get away from you!"

"Don't you fret! We've got 'em!" Dick's voice answered, and the Unknown, with a chuckling laugh, called out:

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is my man! I've got him at last! Stand around there! Keep your hands up! Make one move and you die!"

Ned flung himself on the ground and peered down into the hole.

"Is it all right?" he called, barely able to make out the forms of his friends below.

"All right, you bet! We've got 'em foul!" cried the Unknown.

Corney was whining and begging them not to kill him, and Jim Rayburn's deep imprecations could be distinctly heard.

"Who are they, Ned?" called Dick.

"They are the bosses of the boomers—a pair of desperate Anarchists!" answered Ned. "Hello! Here's Maggie Maxwell again! Keep 'em covered. I'll throw you down rope enough to tie them as soon as I can. Now then, Maggie! I've got the upper hand, you see?"

"Oh, I'm so glad! So glad!" cried the girl; "they are the worst of all the gang; the other can be managed easy enough."

"We want him, though," said Ned, "and I'm going for him now. Stay here, Maggie, and keep watch."

"Oh, do be careful of yourself. Are you armed?"

"Yes; those fellows got one of my revolvers, but I have another."

"Don't hesitate to use it. Father and the rest of the gang may be back any minute. If they come all is lost."

Ned walked rapidly toward the hut calling as he went.

"Hello! What's the matter?" cried the man, a stupid fellow, by the way, running out of the hut.

"Matter enough," answered Ned. "Your two friends have tumbled into a hole out here. Get a rope quick, and come and help them out."

"Blame it all, have they tumbled into the cave?" growled the man. "Don't see how they came to do that."

"Why, one missed his footing and slipped in, and the other grabbed him and was pulled down with him," said Ned.

The fellow seemed to believe him and went into the hut to get the rope.

Ned hurried on to the door and was ready for him the instant he appeared.

"You can drop that rope and throw up your hands, neighbor!" he said, coolly, thrusting the revolver in his face.

"Gee whiz! What's this?" gasped the boomer, turning as white as death.

"Cold business! Drop it! Up hands!"

Down went the rope and up went the hands.

"Maggie! Maggie! Come here!" called Ned.

Maggie Maxwell came running up and following directions took the revolver, while Ned tied the man's hands behind him, and made the other end of the rope fast to one of the bunks.

"We've got you all right now, neighbor," laughed Ned. "I reckon you won't bother us any more."

"Don't kill me, boss," whined the man. "I'll do you a good turn if you'll spare my life."

"You will, eh? What's your name?"

"Fritz Geiger."

"German, eh? Well, Fritz, what do you know?"

"I know a short cut to your camp on El Dorado creek for one thing. Don't you remember me?"

"Seems to me your face is rather familiar."

"It ought to be. I used to work at the Young Klondike."

"A great many have worked for me. I can't place you, but that don't make any difference. If you'll work for me now, I'll pay you well."

"I'll do it."

"I'll give you a thousand dollars down to come over on my side and help me get back the gold I dug on Raccoon creek."

"I can do it. The bulk of it is hidden behind the hut here, boss, but you must be spry, the rest of the gang will soon be here with the balance, and they are a bad lot."

"Stay where you are till I come back and I'll take you up on that offer," said Ned. "Maggie, we want all the rope we can lay our hands on, and then we are off for the cave."

Ten minutes later Young Klondike had the boomers completely at his mercy, or rather Dick and the Unknown had, for with the ropes let down into the cave they were tied fast.

"Now then, for the hoisting!" cried the Unknown. "Ye gods and little fishes! I'm about ready to come out of this hole."

"Time!" called Ned. "Here goes a rope that won't break."

"Prisoners first, or are you going to leave 'em here?" asked Dick.

"We are going to take 'em up, and make them do a little honest work for once in their lives," replied Ned. "But it's Edith first, every time."

"Never mind me," said Edith. "I'll take my turn."

"It's your turn now," said Ned. "Fasten the rope under her arms, Dick. See that everything is tight."

"Ready!" called Dick in a moment, and Ned and Maggie pulled on the rope, which had been passed around a tree, and Edith came up out of the hole.

Then Jim Rayburn was hoisted up, and next Corney. Dick followed, and the Unknown came last.

The two Anarchists looked rather foolish, and seemed greatly disturbed.

"I suppose you think yourself a confoundedly smart fellow, Young Klondike?" growled Jim.

"He's smart enough for us every time," said Cor-



ney. "He ought to have been shot off-hand—that's what ought to have been done to him."

"If you two fellows don't hold your jaw I'll shoot you off-hand!" cried the Unknown. "Now, then, Young Klondike, here we are all safe and sound! Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me what ought to be done?"

"The first thing to do is to thank this girl for her help," said Ned.

"And I do with all my heart," added Edith. "If there is anything I can do for you, Maggie, it shall be done."

"You can do nothing," replied the girl feelingly, "although I thank you a thousand times. I can't desert my father, bad as he is. Don't lose any time; please go!"

This was good advice, and Ned determined to follow it. Dick and the Unknown were of the same mind, as soon as they understood how the case was.

The prisoners were now taken back to the hut, and the man Fritz set free.

The gold bags were found hidden behind the hut, where the boomers had put them, and Ned proceeded to load down Fritz, and then Jim Rayburn and Corney, being disarmed and set free, were made to take their share.

"Gosh! This is hard lines. Do you mean to make pack horses out of us?" growled Rayburn, when he found out what Ned proposed to do.

"That's exactly what we mean," said the Unknown. "You are the horses and I'm the driver, and let me tell you this much, if you make one move to double on us or show the least sign of treachery I'm going to shoot you and no monkey business. By the Jumping Jeremiah, I say what I mean!"

Within ten minutes from the time they reached the hut the procession started.

Fritz led the way and Young Klondike walked beside him. Maggie Maxwell waved good-by to them from the hut.

The poor girl was in tears; she had taken a great fancy to Edith, and Ned's last kind words touched her deeply.

"If you ever want a friend come to me," he said; "and remember this—while I don't recognize your father's claim to the mine on Raccoon creek, I fully recognize your claim on me. I shall pay to you at any time you will call for it the sum of ten thousand dollars. This I count as due you for what you have done for us, and not because your father has any hold on the claim."

Fritz led the way through a narrow pass, and after a little they came out upon the side of the mountain where an extended view could be had.

To their great satisfaction the Young Klondike mine was plainly visible, and not more than ten miles away.

Nothing was seen of the boomers, and inside of three hours the heavily loaded procession came into camp.

The miners turned out to meet them, and gave Young Klondike a rattling reception.

Rayburn and Corney were as meek as lambs now, and made no objection when they were locked up in the mill until it should be decided how to dispose of them.

That night after working hours Young Klondike, after due consultation with his partners, made one of those happy strokes of good policy which served to bind his workmen to him.

Calling them all together at the mill, he told about the claim on Raccoon creek, and the wonderful deposit of nuggets.

"Boys," he said, "it ain't exactly a winter claim, but I'm determined to work it now. I want twelve men to help me out, and every man shall have a share in this mine. I'm going to organize a company, and you who join me in this winter's work shall all have an interest. Who'll go? I'll leave it to yourselves to decide."

Now there were about twenty men working on the Young Klondike at that time, and all wanted to go. The prospect of exposure and hard work in the winter did not deter them a bit.

"Can't be done," said Ned, when they all began talking together. "I can't let in more than twelve on this deal, so it will have to be a matter of lot."

So the lots were drawn. The name of each man was written on a slip of paper and put into a hat, Edith drawing out twelve.

As she drew the names she called them out aloud, and thus the matter was settled.

The new Raccoon mining company was accordingly formed.

Next day Ned and Dick started for Dawson City to locate their claim, going as far as the mouth of Bonanza creek by dog team, for a cold snap had come and the creeks were frozen over now.

The Klondike was still open, however, and as Ned had left his naphtha launch at the mouth of Bonanza, where there was a mine, they were able to put it through to Dawson, file their claim and get back to Bonanza creek before the river closed.

This was the last of river travel that winter.

Ned drove the dogs into Young Klondike in a snow storm.

His first inquiry was for Rayburn and Corney Brown.

"Oh," said the Unknown, "they are working for their living now. We got tired of holding them prisoners and put them to work in the mine."

This sounded well and was all very well as far as it went, but next morning when Ned went out to the boarding-house to have a talk with the two boomers, being anxious to get some points about the rest of the gang, he found that they had vanished in the night.

Where they had gone or how, no one could tell.



## CHAPTER X.

## THE FIGHT FOR THE CLAIM BEGINS.

"WHAT in thunder is the matter with you, Young Klondike?" asked the Unknown, as Ned hurried back to the house, meeting the detective at the door.

"Matter enough! Those fellows have taken French leave."

"What fellows?"

"Jim Rayburn and Corney."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, you don't say so!"

But it was so, and nobody seemed able to explain it.

"That means a fight for the claim," said Ned emphatically, "but that shan't deter us. The Raccoon Creek Mining Company is a fixed fact now, and to-morrow morning we make our start, boomers or no boomers!"

It was a busy day.

Six dog sleds were loaded down with goods for the new diggings.

There were the parts of a portable house in two, mining tools, and every appliance for doing good work on two more, and provisions enough for a month's supply on the others.

Beside these things, the men were all well loaded when the time to start came next morning.

Young Klondike's company consisted of seventeen persons—the twelve miners, his own party and Fritz Geiger, who was anxious to go back with the rest.

The start was made an hour before daylight, as the old trail under the mountain was to be their road, and they could hardly hope to do much more than put it through to Raccoon creek before dark.

The snow was deep, but as the men were all provided with snow-shoes, they had no more than the usual difficulty in walking on those clumsy appliances, and the dogs managed fairly well for the first few miles.

But when they struck the valley, the snow became light and feathery, and the dogs made terrible work hauling the sleds.

Darkness settled down upon them before they reached the creek, but Ned kept urging them on, and after a terrible pull they managed to reach the brush shelters which were deserted and undisturbed.

It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon, and as the weather was growing decidedly colder Ned saw that some good, honest hustling had to be done to keep them alive through the night.

Many hands—if they are willing hands—make easy work.

Axes were unshipped, and trees felled and boughs lopped off, and before six o'clock ten brush huts had been built.

In these there was room enough for all, and plenty of space for the provisions and tools, besides a comfortable shelter for the dogs.

Meanwhile, great fires had been built, and when supper was served everybody felt comfortable and happy, and the night passed without an alarm.

First thing next morning the gang was put to work to shovel out the prospect-hole, and build a frost fire in the bottom, while others cut away the ice in the creek, so that water for the gold washing could be obtained.

It was noon before the first pan of nuggets came out, and all hands went wild with enthusiasm. There was no doubt about the enormous richness of the claim before, but the men were slow to believe it until they saw it with their own eyes.

"Are you ready to fight for the claim now, boys?" Ned asked.

It is scarcely necessary to record the answer. These men were ready to stand by Young Klondike to the last.

As the day advanced it grew decidedly warmer. When night closed in upon them it was quite mild.

Ned sat up until midnight and left one of his most trusted men on guard when he turned in at last.

He wondered if the boomers had departed from their mountain retreat and was inclined to think so, for, supposing they had not, it certainly seemed strange that no effort had been made to work the claim.

Along about two o'clock Ned was suddenly awakened by a slight noise behind him.

He started up to see a face peering through a parting in the hemlock boughs.

"Who's there?" he exclaimed, springing up.

Crack!

Instantly a shot was fired.

The ball whizzed past Young Klondike's head and the face instantly vanished.

Seizing his rifle, Ned rushed out of the hut.

The stars were shining brightly and there was not a soul to be seen, not even the guard.

All was as silent as the grave, too, until Dick's voice was heard calling:

"Hello! What's the row?"

"Come out here, Dick," answered Ned, quietly.

Dick came scrambling out of the hut sleepily, grasping his rifle.

"Didn't I hear a shot?" he asked.

"Well, I should say you did. It went right over your head."

"Who fired it?"

"Can't make out—can't see the guard, either, but there was somebody looking in at me just before the shot came."

"This means trouble, Ned."

"I'm afraid it does."

"Shall we wake the boys?"

"No; not until we know more. I want to find out what's up before I raise the alarm."

"Let's get around behind the hut and see if there's any trail."

"Just what I propose."

"Perhaps we'd better wake Fritz?"

"What does he know about it? Just you hold on. This is only a trick, and if we find the trail you can take my word for it that will be a part of the trick,



too, and my idea is to make these fellows think they've failed."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just this: These fellows expect me to call up the whole gang and they expect to have the trail followed up. As soon as the camp has been cleared they'll pounce down on it, and grab everything they can lay their hands on. I make no doubt that they are watching us now."

"More than likely. That don't tell me what you are going to do about it, though."

"I'm going to watch. First let's find the trail."

They went around behind the shelters, and there, sure enough, were footsteps in the snow.

There were signs of a struggle, too, and there also was the track of the guard, showing how he had come around from the front, no doubt to investigate some alarm.

"He was captured here," said Ned. "They carried him off into the woods, sure."

"Shall we follow?"

"That would be just what they expect."

"But you wouldn't let the poor fellow remain in their hands?"

"No. In spite of my theory, I think we'll have to have help. I guess we'd better call the Unknown."

"Help, boss! Help! Quick! They are going to knife me!"

The cry came out from among the timber where the guard had been carried.

Not a doubt now that the boomers were at their old tricks again.

Following the impulse of the moment, Ned and Dick ran in the direction of the sound and were inside the timber line in a moment.

It would have been a serious mistake if Ned's eyes had been less sharp than they were.

Behind every tree was a man!

Crack! Bang! Instantly Ned fired twice and retreated.

Dick got in two shots also before he jumped back.

"They are all there!" he cried.

"You bet! Here they come!"

Half a dozen men sprang out from behind the trees and began blazing away.

"Boomers! Boomers!" cried Ned, rushing around to the front of the camp.

All at once there was another rush from the timber.

It was old man Maxwell, and four men this time.

They carried blazing torches in their hands which they threw against the brush shelters.

They did their work only too well.

In an instant the hemlocks were afire.

Everywhere the torches struck the mischief was done.

"Clear 'em out! Drive 'em off the claim!" shouted old Maxwell, and by the light of the burning hemlocks Young Klondike could see Jim Rayburn and Corney Brown among the rest.

By this time there was a general alarm all through the camp.

The Unknown came tumbling out of his shelter in a hurry, and Edith, grasping her rifle, rushed out of bed; most of the men were out with their rifles by the time Ned and Dick got around in front of the burning huts.

"It's the boomers! It's the boomers, and they've captured Dan Casey!" shouted Ned. "Let them have it, boys! Steady now! Fire! Never mind the huts!"

They blazed away, returning shot for shot with the boomers, who, seeing that they were likely to get the worst of it, sullenly retreated to the timber, leaving Young Klondike to manage his burning camp the best he could.

## CHAPTER XI.

### LOOKING FOR THE GANG.

"WELL, now, by the Jumping Jeremiah, they've pretty well cleaned us out."

Of course it was the Unknown who made this remark.

The detective stood gazing at the ruins of the camp which it had taken so much trouble to build.

Once hemlock boughs get burning, there is no such thing as stopping them.

Seeing plainly that there was no time to follow up the enemy if he expected to save any of his belongings, Young Klondike ordered the men to give their whole attention to getting out the goods, and fortunately everything of any real value was saved.

But the fire left the camp a wreck and made active work necessary to repair the loss.

Leaving six men to attend to this, Young Klondike, with Dick, Edith, the Unknown and the rest, lighted lanterns, and arming themselves with rifles, started to follow the boomers' trail.

They had not gone twenty yards before they came upon the dead body of poor Dan Casey.

There he lay upon the snow with a knife driven into his heart.

Tied to the hilt of the knife was a folded paper, on which was written:

"Your fate, Young Klondike, and the fate of every man in your party if you don't immediately vacate your camp on Raccoon creek. Understand this, we mean to fight for that claim to the last gasp."

This was the letter, and Jim Rayburn signed it.

It was anything but a pleasant discovery, to say the least.

"What scoundrels they are!" exclaimed Edith. "Oh, Ned, I wish this hadn't occurred. It will throw a blight on this claim from the start."

"He shall be avenged!" cried Ned. "I declare right here and now that I'll never rest until that wretch of a Rayburn has paid for this."



An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is part of the unwritten law of the Klondike.

Such work as this meets with but small favor among the honest miners, and the men were loud in their demands to be allowed to go on and hunt the murderers down.

As for Ned, he had no other idea, and they immediately started on to follow the trail.

It led them to the foot of the mountain, and then turned abruptly to the right, and ran along the base of the cliffs for about half a mile, when it suddenly vanished.

Young Klondike stopped and stared, hardly able to believe his eyes.

"What in the world does this mean?" he exclaimed. "What's become of them, I'd like to know."

It was most mysterious.

Here were the footprints, trodden deep in the snow, up to that point, and there they suddenly ceased.

"Ye gods and little fishes, here's a case for a detective!" cried the Unknown.

"Yes, but I'd like to see the detective who could solve the mystery. Did they vanish into the air or sink into the snow, or what?"

"Give it up for now, but give me time to think about it, and I'll give you the answer."

"It's a trick of some kind," said Dick; "and I'll be blest if I can make head or tail of it."

"It's a bluff," said the Unknown. "This is done to throw us off the scent. If anybody is hungry, now is the time to take breakfast. I want a chance to think."

As all hands were hungry this suggestion met with general approval.

A fire was built, coffee made and ham fried; but the Unknown paid no attention to all this.

He kept pacing up and down looking at the snow. Ned joined him after a little.

"It beats the band where they went to, it just does," said the detective; "the more I think of it the more I don't see what the explanation is."

"I say the same," replied Ned. "I've been puzzling my brains over it, but I can't make out what it means."

"If the footprints ended near the rocks I might fancy they jumped over on them, and that there was a secret cave or something of the sort, but they couldn't jump to the rocks from here."

"That's right. It just couldn't be done. Can't you think of some other scheme?"

The detective couldn't and he said so, and then he asked Ned to go away and leave him.

"I can work this problem out better alone," he declared. "You go and get your breakfast, dear boy, and rely on me to have some answer for you before long."

Ned returned to the fire which had been started back a little way from where the trail ended, so that the Unknown's operations might not be interfered with.

He now sat down on the snow, and took his breakfast with the rest.

Once in a while he would look back at the Unknown.

Sometimes the detective was standing still, looking at the snow; at others he was pacing up and down, with his tall hat tipped back on his head.

"Zed's stumped," declared Dick. "He'll never find out what that mystery means."

"Who says he won't?" said Edith. "If I was given to betting, I'd put up good money that he will." About five minutes later Dick looked around again.

"Hello! Where is he now?" he exclaimed.

The Unknown had vanished.

Ned sprang up and hurried to the spot.

"There was nothing to be seen of the detective."

His footprints, which he had taken care to keep apart from those of the boomers did not go on, so it was evident that he had not moved forward.

Where then had he gone? Just as the boomer had disappeared, so had the Unknown.

"This knocks me all out," declared Ned. "Dick, come here."

Dick came, and Ned pointed to the footprints.

"Can you imagine where he's gone?" he asked.

Dick couldn't get around the problem, but Edith solved it an instant later.

"He pulled down the branch and went up that tree with it!" she exclaimed.

Now, on their right grew a thick clump of spruce trees, the mountain being on the left. They were evidently of great age; the heavy branches grew right down to the snow, but the trees were so old that there were also heavy branches above.

It would have been an easy matter for the Unknown to have pulled down one of these upper branches and by its aid climb up into the tree.

"Wouldn't wonder if you had hit it!" cried Ned.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" A chuckling laugh was heard.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'm all right! I know where they went now!" the Unknown cried.

They could hear him, but couldn't see him.

"Where are you, Zed?" cried Edith.

"Find out! Ha! Ha! I've caught the trail!"

"He ain't up the tree, but he's in there somewhere," exclaimed Ned, and he made a break in among the spruces, striking a huge boulder before he had gone ten feet, which had been completely concealed from where they stood.

The Unknown was seated on the boulder laughing.

"This is all right," he said. "Those fellows were shrewd; they meant to throw us off the scent and did it. Every mother's son of them climbed that tree and went from it to the next one and then jumped on the rock. You can see for yourself, boys, that the trail begins right here."

This was the case. Beyond the boulder the trail ran into the woods. All they had to do was to follow right on now.

"You go back and get your breakfast, Zed. We'll keep right on with this," said Ned.

"Don't know as I want to do that," said the de-



tective. "I've made a ten strike and I may spoil it by stopping to eat."

But Ned insisted, and at last the Unknown yielded and went back.

Dick was strongly of the opinion that it would be better to wait until daylight, but Ned was determined to push ahead.

"They must have a good start of us," he said, "and all I propose to do is to follow them out of the woods and find out what turn they took. This trail don't lead up on the mountains, and if they've got another camp somewhere about here we want to know it right away."

"What do you mean to do if you locate them?" asked Edith.

"They ought to be shot, every one of them," declared Dick.

"But we ain't in that business."

"No, we'll act fair," said Ned. "The El Dorado Regulators shall try them. We'll have no lynching. Back to the Young Klondike they go, and we'll proceed in the usual way."

Now, it must be understood that among the miners on the creeks emptying into the Klondike, murder cases and robberies are not as a rule submitted to the law.

It is impossible to do so. To send criminals to Dawson City would not only be expensive, but in the winter often impossible.

For this reason the mine owners have an association of their own, a sort of Vigilance committee which passes under the name of the El Dorado Regulators, who meet and hear the evidence against the criminal.

The decision of the Regulators is final. Sometimes the criminal is condemned to be shot, sometimes they are hung or run out of the region, but they are never imprisoned, for that is impossible.

From the decision of the Regulators there is no appeal.

Young Klondike was a Regulator, and Dick was another, but it took six to try a man.

So Ned determined that in case of capture he would run the boomers back to the Young Klondike, call in the Regulators and punish them according as the decision went.

Leaving the Unknown to go back to breakfast, Ned, Dick and Edith now moved on along the trail.

It led them through the woods for about half a mile, and then they came suddenly out upon an open plain through which a creek ran.

The creek was frozen over, of course, and the trail ran right across it.

Ned followed it to the base of the mountain on the other side, where it entered a gloomy defile.

"This is as far as we can safely go now," he declared. "To show our light in there would certainly be running a great risk."

"Do you propose to go back?" asked Dick.

"I don't see the sense in all of us going back."

"Nor I."

"Suppose you go back and bring up the boys. Edith and I will stay here and wait for you!"

Dick demurred, but as Ned insisted, it was finally decided that way.

Dick took the lantern and started, leaving Ned and Edith under a projecting rock at the base of the mountain, which formed a sort of cave.

Here they remained for nearly an hour, which was longer than they had expected.

"What can be keeping them?" exclaimed Ned at last. "Upon my word, it seems as if they ought to have been here by this time. I can't understand it at all."

"It ain't possible that they have missed their way, is it?" questioned Edith.

"I don't see how it can be with Dick to guide them."

"It's almost a pity we didn't bring Fritz Geiger along with us. He might have helped us out here."

Edith had said this before, but Young Klondike did not agree with her.

He had left Fritz back at Raccoon creek, to help work on the rebuilding of the camp, because he did not feel sure of the man.

Ned now began pacing up and down before the cave, while Edith reclined under the shelter of the rocks on the blankets.

The moments passed, and still there was no sign of their friends.

"Something has happened. We must go back and look them up," he declared at last. "I can't stand this sort of thing any longer. We ought to have gone with Dick. I'll not separate again."

Now, this was a decided case of shutting the stable door after the horse was out.

Morning was just at hand, and feeling certain that he would be able to follow the trail, Young Klondike was preparing for a start, when all at once a sharp firing was heard in the distance.

"What in the world is that?" Edith exclaimed.

"Trouble!" cried Ned. "Something has gone wrong."

"Of course it can't be anything but our boys fighting with the boomers."

"Don't see how it can. It ain't to be supposed that there is anyone else up here."

"The shots are away over there on our left."

"Not so very far, either, Edith. Listen to them! They are making things lively, whoever they are."

"Shall we go over and investigate?"

"I suppose we might as well. It's leaving the trail, to be sure, but we can't very well miss our way back. We shall have our own trail to guide us when we want to return."

They started along the base of the mountain, making the best time possible through the snow, which had drifted here and lay deep.

Before they had gone far they came to another defile leading in between high, rocky walls.

The shots which still continued at intervals seemed



to be up this opening, and right here Young Klondike struck a trail.

"By gracious! They went this way, Edith!" he exclaimed.

There were many footprints to the trail.

Evidently a large company of men, some with snow-shoes and some without, had entered the canyon.

"That's what's the matter," said Ned. "They went this way. How could Dick make such a mistake?"

"If there had been a trail to follow it would seem to be easy enough," said Edith. "This opening looks just like the other—you can see that."

"There's no denying it."

"Are you sure there was no trail here, Ned? The snow is so trampled down that it isn't easy to tell."

"If Zed was here he could tell."

"So can you if you'll study these footprints a bit."

"I'll do that. Here, let's take it easy. They seem to have stopped firing now. Whatever mischief has been done has been done, and the delay of a few moments can't make any difference."

Ned bent over the footprints and examined them with attention.

"There are two trails here," he said at last.

"Sure?"

"Oh, yes."

"How do you get at it?"

"Well, see; the snow-shoe prints cover the others in ever so many places."

"Most of our men have snow-shoes."

"Exactly, and the few who didn't make these prints, you see how they lie over others which have been made before?" Ned pointed out the places.

Edith decided that his reasoning was correct.

There could be no doubt that Dick had led the party into this canyon.

But how came the mistake; that was the question. Ned had a theory for that, too.

"I'll tell you how it was!" he exclaimed. "There were two trails leading away from the spruce tree, and Dick got the wrong one."

"We've got to go up into the canyon there, Ned; that's all there is about it," Edith declared.

And they went.

There was nothing else to do if they wanted to unite with their friends and keep on looking for the gang.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LAST OF THE BOOMERS.

THE sun rose as Ned entered the canyon. Up and down the rugged walls the snow glittered, and the long icicles sparkled. It was a beautiful sight, but Ned was in no mood to admire the beauties of Klondike scenery just then.

Pushing in for a few hundred yards, always keep-

ing with the trail, Young Klondike was suddenly brought to a halt by seeing a man step out from the rocks, and plant himself in the middle of the canyon.

He took off his hat and waved it as a signal to Ned.

"Hello, Fritz Geiger!" cried Edith. "We are all right now!"

"Hello, boss! I was just coming after you!" called Fritz, hurrying forward. "They are all up this way!"

He came up and joined Ned and Edith, talking as he advanced.

"We seem to have missed you, boss," he said. "Don't know how it is. Mr. Luckey was sure he had the right trail, but it seems he hadn't after all. It was a deuce of a mistake, too, for we ran in on the gang suddenly and gave them the scare when we hadn't ought to. Suppose you heard the firing just now?"

"Yes, we did. Anybody hurt?" asked Ned, anxiously.

"Nobody on our side. I don't know how it went with the boomers. They retreated up the mountain and I'm afraid we've lost them now."

The man's manner was perfectly natural. It was impossible for Young Klondike to suspect him.

"Where are the boys now, Fritz?" he asked.

"Right ahead here watching for the enemy. They've just discovered that they'd made a mistake and got into the wrong canyon, and Mr. Luckey told me to go back and look you up."

"Do you know this place?"

"Not at all."

"The boomers never came in here while you were with them?"

"Never! I suppose they were afraid to go back to our old hut up on the mountain for fear you would follow them there."

"Like enough you're right. Lead on, Fritz. It's a good job we met you. I was just beginning to wonder what I should do."

Fritz pushed on up the canyon.

Suddenly coming to a place where a cross canyon ran off to the right, he turned aside.

At the same instant there were strange sounds heard ahead.

A huge rock seemed to be crashing down the mountain. They could hear it tearing over the ledges, and then it struck with a force which made the ground tremble.

"What in thunder is that?" gasped Ned, stopping short.

"None of your business, Young Klondike!" cried Fritz, suddenly throwing up his rifle and covering Ned. "You'll surrender—that's what you'll do!"

"Not to you, you scoundrel!" shouted Ned, and he instantly fired, as did the treacherous boomer.

Both shots missed, and no more were fired.

It would have been useless on Ned's part, for in the same instant three men sprang out from among



the rocks behind them, and three more joined Fritz in front.

Among the latter were Jim Rayburn and Corney Brown.

"You'll surrender, Young Klondike!" shouted the former. "We've got you now, you blasted monopolist! We are going to win this fight for the Raccoon creek claim!"

Evidently Young Klondike and Edith had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and there we must leave them, while for the time being we return to Dick and the Unknown.

It happened just as Ned figured it out.

Dick got back to camp all right, and found the Unknown impatiently awaiting his return.

An immediate start was made for the canyon, but when they reached the bowlder behind the spruce trees they struck the double trail, which the detective had not noticed before.

Nor did they notice it now. In the darkness they went off on the new trail, which led them a long way around through the woods, coming out upon the frozen creek at last.

They never doubted for an instant that they were going right until now, when Dick suddenly declared that they had gone twice as far as they should have done.

This started the detective up, and he began to examine the trail.

"No snow-shoes here," he declared. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'm an ass! I ought to have looked into this before."

But the trail led straight on, and there were the mountains right ahead.

They crossed over to them, and struck the canyon; the trail led into the canyon, but Dick knew that it could not be the same canyon that he and Ned had struck.

He immediately proposed following along the foot of the cliffs until they came to the cave, and no doubt they would have done so, if just at that moment they had not caught sight of three men looking out at them between the walls of the canyon.

"The boomers!" cried Geiger, running forward. "There they are! There they are!"

He was out of sight in a moment around the bend of the rocks, and the three men, who jumped back the moment they caught sight of Dick's party disappeared too.

"Treachery!" cried the detective. "That fellow means to desert. After him, boys!"

They all went up the canyon on the run, but saw nothing of the men until they had passed the mouth of the cross canyon where Ned was betrayed and came suddenly into a small circular inclosure, or sink, where towering cliffs surrounded them on all sides.

The passage in was through a narrow opening between the rocks, not over four feet wide, through which they passed single file.

They had no sooner entered the sink when this passage was blocked by a dozen boomers, who in-

stantly opened fire upon them and drove them back into the sink.

It was hot work for a few moments.

The boomers were well armed and good shots, and if it had been daylight there is no doubt that some damage would have been done.

As it was the Klondikers were on the full retreat, and no efforts on the part of Dick and the Unknown could rally them, when all at once the boomers turned and ran back through the narrow pass which formed the mouth of the sink.

This brought a halt and a lecture from the Unknown.

"What's the matter with you fellows? Are you a pack of cowards?" he cried. "Don't you want to see poor Dan Casey avenged? I'm ashamed of you all! If this is the way you are going to fight the sooner we give up the job the better. Better call in the boomers and surrender, I say."

"We'd better get out of here as quick as ever we can, that's what we'd better do," said Dick. "We are in a trap."

"We'll get out if they'll let us," said the detective, "but I doubt very much if they give us the chance, and in the meantime, like enough, they are after Ned and Edith. We've made a deuce of a mistake, and that treacherous skunk Fritz knew we were doing it all the time."

They started back for the pass now.

Daylight had come, but they could see nothing of their enemies until they had almost reached the pass, when the Unknown suddenly caught sight of four men up on the cliffs.

There was a big bowlder here. It had lodged on the edge of the cliff which overhung the pass on the right, and the four men were pushing on it with all their might.

Crash! it went down into the pass, choking it up completely.

This was one of those singular freaks of nature called rocking stones.

The bowlder had lodged on the edge of the cliff, and although as big as a house it only needed a comparatively slight force to send it crashing down in the way it came.

It was a bad job for Dick and his party.

Hemmed in now with the bowlder blocking the way in front and the cliffs all about them, it looked very much as if they were in the sink to stay.

Such was their situation when the attack was made upon Young Klondike and Edith. The fight for the Raccoon creek claim was in full swing now.

Ned and Edith were at once made prisoners and hurried on through the cross canyon until they came to the entrance to a sizable cave, where there was a fire burning. This was evidently the boomers' camp.

"So, so, Young Klondike!" sneered Rayburn, "we've got you hard and fast again, it seems. You will put us at your dirty work and keep us slaving like horses, will you? Didn't go down, did it? When we got ready to escape we escaped, didn't we? Ha,



ha, ha! It takes a smart man to get the best of Jim Rayburn, and don't you forget it! Come out here, Maxwell! We've got your enemies again!"

Old man Maxwell came shuffling out of the cave blinking at the light.

Looking in through the entrance Ned and Edith could see Maggie working at the breakfast. She paid no attention; in fact, she did not seem to see them at all.

"Well, well, well! I swan! So you have!" chuckled the old scoundrel. "It's Young Klondike and the gal. Where's the rest of their crew?"

"Hemmed in the sink. The boys tumbled down the rocking stone and blocked up the pass."

"Well, I vow! Jim, you did do it, didn't you? Nothing the matter with our taking possession of my claim now, I reckon. Oh, no!"

"I guess not! You can thank Fritz for this. He ran ahead and gave us warning. I told you Fritz would work it. That's why we left him behind us at the mine. Now, then, what's to be done with these two? As for the rest let 'em starve to death in the sink, while we go down and clear out the others at the claim."

"Shoot 'em!" said old Maxwell, vindictively. "Shoot 'em! That's what ought to have been done in the first place."

"Not the girl. We'd better let her live."

"Well, I don't care about the gal so much. If you want to let her live, why do it, but Young Klondike must die!"

"Settled," said Rayburn. "Now, then, my brave young monopolizer, say your prayers! I'll give you fifteen minutes. Take the gal into the inner cave, boys, and tie her up for the present, or she'll be making Satan's own row if you don't."

It was hard lines for Ned. Separated from Edith, he sat there in the corner of the cave while the boomers ate their breakfast.

No attention was paid to him. Rayburn and Corney were discussing a plan of attack upon the men left at the claim.

At last Jim Rayburn sprang up and announced that the time had come.

"We'll kill him now! Stand him up against the wall there!" he said. Then suddenly looking around, he added:

"Where's Maggie? Why ain't she here?"

The girl had vanished.

Old Maxwell called her outside, but she did not answer. He looked for her in the inner cave, but she was not there.

"Oh, she's taken herself off somewhere!" he declared. "She don't like this sort of business. No matter. Fire away and get done with it. I shan't rest satisfied while Young Klondike is alive!"

"You ungrateful wretch!" broke out Ned, drawn out of his silence at last. "I shouldn't think you could! Have you forgotten how I saved your life? This is your return, is it? You can kill me if you

choose, but no good will come of it. Remember what I tell you. Justice will be done!"

"Hold your jaw!" broke in Rayburn savagely. "We want none of your preaching! Stand up there now! No, you won't? Lift him up, boys!"

"I can face the music," said Ned, rising. "You've got the drop on me. I ain't afraid to die!"

Most certainly the boomers of Raccoon creek had the drop on Young Klondike just then, for they covered him with their rifles as he stood there against the wall, calmly facing his awful fate.

Meanwhile what of Maggie Maxwell? Had she forgotten her gratitude? Could she stand by and see Young Klondike murdered in cold blood?

Not by any means!

Maggie was a brave girl and a true one in spite of the wretched influences under which she had been brought up.

She waited only to learn the whole story and then while breakfast was in progress watched her chance and slipped out of the cave, running through the cross canyon at full speed.

Perhaps Dick and the Unknown would have felt some slight encouragement if they could have known this, but they didn't, of course.

Hemmed in the sink Dick's party found themselves in a sorry plight.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is the worst yet," the Unknown exclaimed. "To be walled up here like a rat in a trap makes me tired! Ye gods and little fishes, I ought to be cowhided for missing the trail!"

"It's as much my fault as yours," declared Lick. "You didn't know the trail and I did. When a man can't follow back his own footprints through the snow it is high time that something should be done!"

"Well," said the detective, "there's no sort of use making any more talk about it. We've got to act. What's worrying me the most is the fear that Ned and Edith will fall into the hands of the boomers. If that should happen, there's no telling what the result might be."

It had already happened, if he had only known it, and the result threatened to be very serious. The Unknown would have been wild if he had guessed the truth.

A short time was spent in trying to scale the bowlder, but it proved to be impossible. Its slippery sides resisted all Dick's efforts, and if Dick couldn't climb it then it was quite certain that nobody else could.

"That won't do. How about the cliffs?" said the Unknown. "It does seem as if there ought to be some means of getting up, but I'll be hanged if I can see any way."

They tried it on both sides of the bowlder, but failed utterly.

Further on the cliffs were perpendicular, and there was just no chance at all.

They were just about to give up in despair, when all at once Dick spied a woman's figure on the cliff from which the bowlder had been pushed down.



"Maggie Maxwell!" he cried. "Hooray! We are going to have help now!"

"Mr. Luckey! Mr. Luckey! Come and save them!" shouted Maggie from the cliffs. "Young Klondike and Miss Edith are in the hands of the boomers. If you ain't quick murder will be done!"

This startling announcement aroused everybody, of course, but Maggie was not one of the kind to talk and not act.

She knew all about the sink, and had not come unprepared.

Down came a long rope tumbling over the cliff.

"I've made it fast to a tree here!" called Maggie.

"I know you can pull yourself up, Mr. Luckey, and then you can help those who can't."

It took Dick just about two minutes to put himself on top of the cliff.

While the Unknown was coming up Maggie told all, and Dick's impatience was so great that he could scarcely wait for the others to follow. It took time, for some had to be pulled up over the rocks.

And well might he be impatient. No situation could have been more critical than Young Klondike's then, but it was even worse a few moments later when poor Ned stood facing the boomers' rifles, for then it looked as though all was over.

Ned closed his eyes, waiting for the fatal shots—prepared to die.

But the shots did not come.

Something else did though.

Suddenly there was a rush outside the cave and a wild shout.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I've got my man at last!" cried the voice of the Unknown.

There was a revolver at Jim Rayburn's head and another at old man Maxwell's, while the rifles of the Klondikers covered the Raccoon creek gang.

It was all over now.

Relief had come just at the critical moment. No

holding back on the part of Young Klondike's men any more.

The Unknown had the handcuffs, which he always carried, on Rayburn's wrists in a jiffy, and Dick backed old Maxwell up against the wall, and held him there while the boomers were secured.

Ned ran into the inner cave and brought out Edith, who had been in terrible agony, for, of course, she could hear all that passed outside.

After that Young Klondike returned to Raccoon creek, taking his prisoners with him. They did not stop longer than to bury poor Dan Casey, however, but marched their prisoners back to the mine.

Next day the Regulators were summoned and the trial began.

Maxwell showed the white feather from the start, and told how Jim Rayburn shot Dan Casey.

This settled the fate of the boss of the boomers. He was shot at sundown, and the rest of the gang were hunted off down the creek, with a warning that any one who returned would meet with a similar fate.

Shortly after the whole party returned to Raccoon creek, Maggie Maxwell going with them.

The brave girl remained some time with Edith, subsequently marrying one of the miners at the new claim.

The Raccoon creek diggings proved immensely successful, and greatly added to the wealth of Golden & Luckey. Maggie Maxwell was made rich by a gift of fifty thousand dollars, besides which she has a share in the mine.

But Young Klondike does not drop out of sight here. The next number of this series will be devoted to certain startling adventures which occurred to our friends while at St. Michaels, some time before these happenings occurred. This story, which is full of thrilling interest from beginning to end, is entitled "YOUNG KLONDIKE'S DEEP SEA DIGGINGS; OR, WORKING AT THE MOUTH OF THE YUKON."

[THE END.]

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